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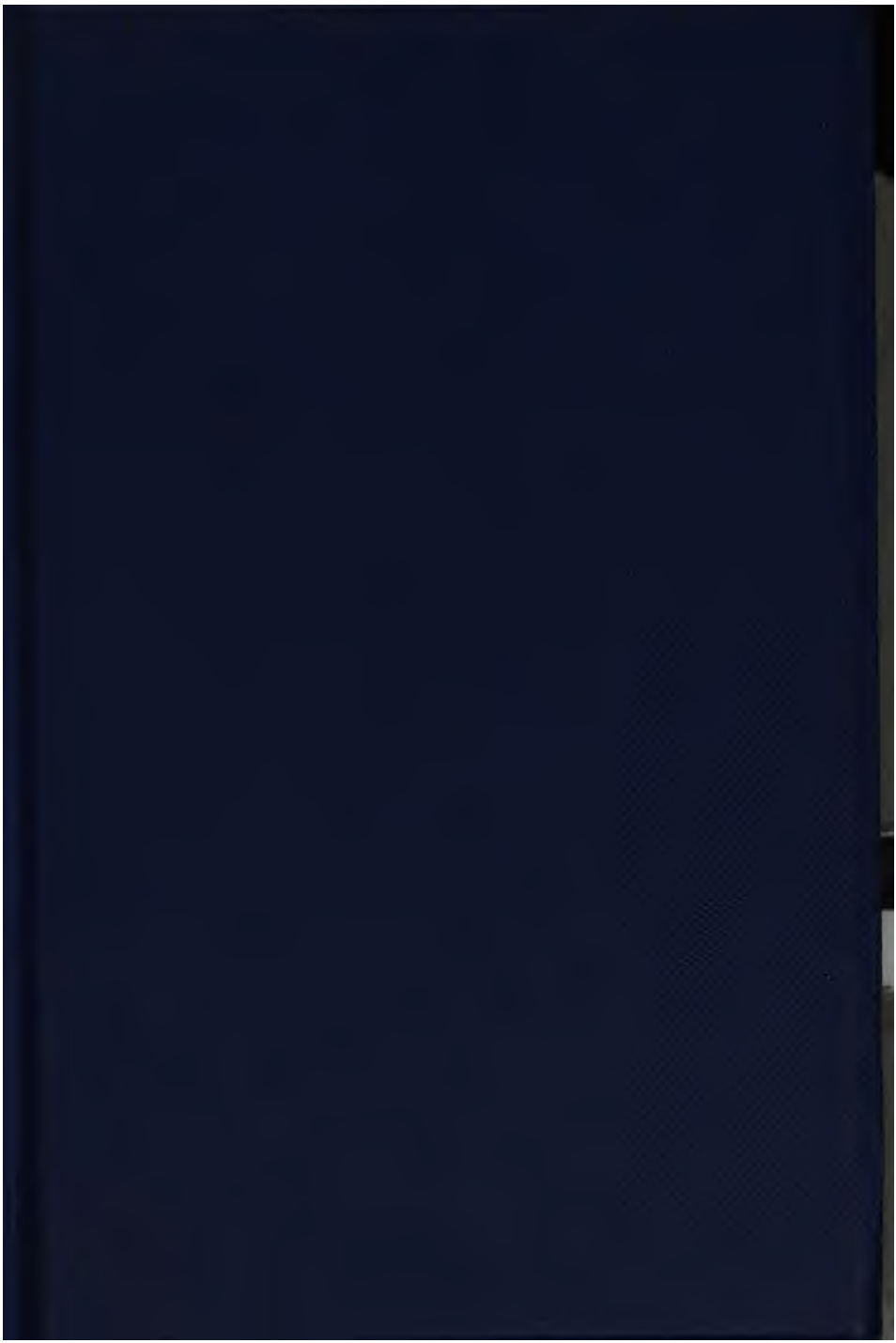

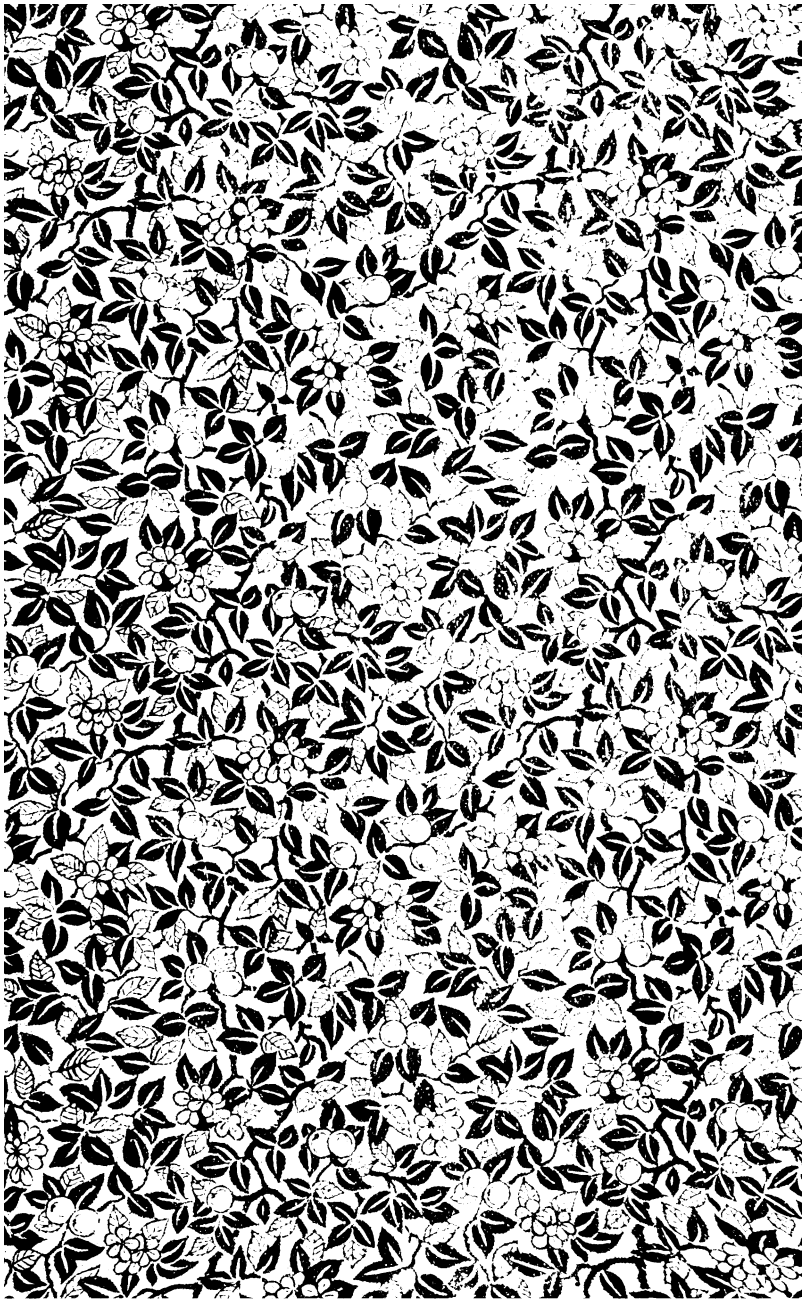

MRS. KEITH'S CRIME.

A Record.

"O Wedding-Guest! this soul has been
Alone on a wide, wide sea."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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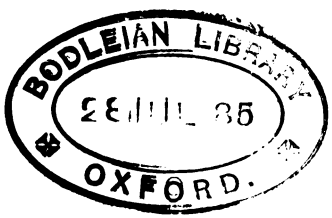

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TO

M. D. W.

MRS. KEITH'S CRIME.

It would be useless to try to account for the manner in which this history came to be written down. It is obvious that Mrs. Keith's hand could not have written it, nor could her voice have given it utterance, and there was none by her in that hour when love gave her terrible strength, and left her to brave eternity. It seems almost as if, as she passed along, the air itself bore witness and the wind swept into the heart of one who understood, all the unspoken thoughts of that passionate life.

CHAPTER I.

It cannot be true; it must be fancy. The child is growing, has grown too fast, is delicate,

and he did not know what to say, and yet he looked so grave when he heard that my mother and sister had both long ago died of consumption. "It often skips a generation, and then shows itself again," he said, and he seemed sorry for us when he said good-bye.

If anything happened to Molly I should go mad—to Molly, the little one who came six months after her father died; Molly, with the strange longing that half frightens me written in her eyes, a longing that perhaps only years hence I shall learn to understand;—to Molly, who is more than half the living world to me. More than half, I say, for there is Jack; and a bonnie boy is Jack, going on for eight years old. He has sturdy legs, and wide-open blue eyes, and a crop of golden hair. But my heart has never ached for him as it has for Molly, and love has no bands that bind so fast and close as those that fear and sorrow weave. If Molly dies—— But I dare not think of it, for I can face nothing, can go on no longer, if that is to be. After all, we have only a certain

amount of courage in us, and mine was all used up in past days; there is none left for this.

How cruel it seems. I sit down and try to think over the years since Molly's father died. They are only a few, after all, and yet how long a time they seem. You know how it all came about, how happy we were, how in an hour the whole world changed. It is maddening to remember it—the summer morning and the sunshine; and the laughter of the children on the beach; and his last words, "I shall not be long, my darling. Go home and wait for me. You are tired." I got up and went home, turning, as I stood on the steps, to take another look at the sea—the sea that was killing him even while I looked, and laughed, and felt so happy; and then I waited for him just as he had told me. They carried him back. I can hear the slow tramp, tramp of their feet now, and see the water dropping from his hair and the cloth with which they had covered him. There he lay, he who but

an hour before had been a strong man, dead —dead for evermore. . . .

There was no money when Arthur died. His pictures were only just beginning to sell. We had made this little home in St. John's Wood, and lived on hope and credit and the few commissions that came in, and on anything that turned up; a pleasant, happy-go-lucky life enough, but one in which there was no margin left for accident or sorrow. I wrote to uncle Clement, the one relation we had in the world, or rather, the only one at all likely to help us. He was very good in a rather cold, hold-aloof manner. He and my father had never been very cordial brothers; the one was rich, and the other had had nothing but his pay, and many a deep gulf is dug with gold, especially between relations. But he was very good to the children and me, and let us stay in this little house, and kept us going, to a certain extent.

When I got better I wanted to do something for myself, and, after much consideration,

decided to give lessons in painting; but it was very difficult to get pupils, and at last I tried doing portraits of children, and met with a great deal of success. I don't do them very well, perhaps, but the mothers say that I have a knack of catching a likeness, and of catching it just when a child is looking its prettiest; so they are always pleased, and gradually I have become almost a fashion and, though my work is certainly not well paid for, I can get as many portraits to do as I please.

Uncle Clement died three years since, and left me a hundred a year; it is to go to Jack at my death. Poor little Molly was ignored altogether, for uncle Clement did not like girls; he thought them mere frivolities, that sensible women only bore sons, and to daughters he would give no encouragement.

On the whole we have managed pretty well. I think bitterly, as I look round the little drawing-room, with the palms, and the Japanese fans, and the little bits of china, and the daring gold-and-chocolate covers, that give

the room an individuality of its own. I have been so proud of our little home and of all the folk, working folk mostly, artists like myself, who came to see me. It has been something to feel that they recognized me and numbered me among themselves, as if they knew all the longings that were in my work, all the hard-trying and good intentions, and were mercifully blind to the weakness of its execution. Sometimes I have been really successful, and have seen my name in the catalogue of the minor exhibitions. Once it was in the Grosvenor list, and it made me so happy, I felt as if I was swimming through the crowd at the private view, and that all the world was making way for me, conscious of my triumph and sharing it. It seems so foolish now, but I have even tried to learn the names of safe investments for small sums, feeling that the time would come soon when a little could be put by for Jack's education; and now suddenly all this dreaming has vanished.

Molly has been looking ill for a long time.

We went for a fortnight to Broadstairs and spent the days together, we three never separating, but staying all day upon the beach, or dawdling along the little pier, or wandering through the fields to Ramsgate, and drinking milk, and driving back in an extravagant fly. But still she did not get better. She was only growing, I thought, and waited; but she did not get better. Then at last I took her to Dr. Finch. He is a great man; there is no disputing his opinion; and when he had examined Molly he looked grave enough, and said that the best thing of all would be to get her out of England for the winter. "It may be the saving of her," he said gently. It may! I looked up at him half dazed. I am half dazed still.

Mrs. Marshall was waiting to see me when we returned, about her little godchild's portrait. I told her what Dr. Finch had said, and told her so calmly that she looked at me curiously as she answered, "It is very sad for you." She said the words in an odd, polite

voice, as if she wondered whether I cared. Perhaps it bored her to be told about the child, for she is an odd, formal person, with an even, passionless voice and a strange, unsympathetic manner. Once I caught myself wondering whether her husband had made love to her before he married her, and if he did now, and whether she ever did anything kind, save as a matter of principle. With her all things seem to have a foundation of principles or convictions, and love and pity and hate to have no power over her. Perhaps it is an excellent thing; principles and convictions give one cold comfort, but they are responsible for few crimes.

"I am not sure that I can undertake the portrait," I told her. "There are some things to finish, and we are going abroad for the winter."

"You can arrange to leave your work and go?" she asked, in surprise. She knew me a little in old days when Arthur was here, and knew what a struggle we had, and how neces-

sary uncle Clement's help had been afterwards. I half resented the question.

"I must," I answered. "One does not consider whether one can arrange a thing that may save one's child's life."

"Going abroad is very expensive," she said. Her words were considerate, but her voice was still only polite; there was not the ghost of any sympathy in it. It was just as well, in the state of mind I was in.

"It may be expensive," I answered; "but at the worst we'll walk, and I'll carry the babes on my back."

"You'll have to swim across the Channel," she said, with an odd, grim smile.

A flood of memories rushed into my heart at her words, and I checked a little cry that all but escaped my lips. In a moment I had seen Arthur going down to the sea, and had heard him tell me once again to wait for him. Perhaps the message he sent me the moment that he died is written in Molly's eyes; for the first time it went through me like a flash that

this was the strange meaning in them that I was for ever yearning to understand. Mrs. Marshall turned almost pale as she realized all that her words had made me remember.

"I am very sorry," she said humbly; "it was very stupid of me. I am always saying the wrong things. How old is Molly?" she asked, in an abrupt voice, as if anxious to do the best she could towards separating my thoughts from my memories.

"She is nearly six; she is the baby," I answered.

She was silent for a moment, and then she said, more to herself than to me, "Yes, I understand; I dare say you will always call her the baby, even when she is grown up."

And then she went away, and I have come in here to rest and to try and realize what it all means.

It is odd how different this room looks to-day; there is something cruel and mocking about it. There, on the easel, is the picture Clarence Grove gave me at Christmas. The

foreground is coarsely painted, but I never noticed that before. I turn from it, and look at the palms standing in large pots on the floor of the little conservatory, the black-and-white pavement makes me shiver. The flowers about the room are fresh and bright; the chintz covers have a happy dainty air. There is something satisfied about the whole place, and yet Molly is upstairs, and the doctor says that if she goes abroad it may—only that it may and not that it will—be the saving of her. It is odd how difficult it is to feel or realize all that is in the words, though Molly is just life to me. It seems as if I had changed into some other person, and, keeping my own set of memories, look on half curiously at the old self which has shut a door of some kind on me, so that I can no longer enter it. Or else something has failed, some of the wheels in me have ceased to go, as in a machine a little bit out of order. It seems impossible that in a month's time we shall all be in another land, and the studio closed, and the commissions

going elsewhere, and this pretty room will be all covered up, and the palms and the flowers will be dying, and the big picture taken down from the easel and turned with its face to the wall. I wonder what made Clarence Grove give that picture to me? for he is not rich and he has a wife and many children. It is called "The Forsaken Garden," after Swinburne's poem, and under it is a quotation from it—"Bright with a summer to be." In fancy I have often wandered down the half-hidden pathways, and among the brake and briar. It makes me shudder to think of the people who once made the garden trim and neat and full of sweet-smelling flowers; they are all sleeping in the churchyard—you can see their graves over the hill in the corner there—and the sea is breaking on the shingly beach below, and the sun is shining, and strangers are coming to make the garden trim again and to laugh through "the summer to be." I am never tired of wondering who these are that are coming.

I wonder how we shall get the money to take us abroad? This question is beginning to present itself. There are some commissions, but no time to execute them. There is very little money in the house. At Christmas there will be fifty pounds due, but rent and taxes to pay out of it. The money must be found; but how? We have nothing to sell, and no one of whom to borrow. It seems impossible to get it, and yet it must be got somehow. If it only saves her; if only some day I sit here again, knowing that she is upstairs, bright and strong and sturdy as Jack is, what trifles all the difficulties will seem looking back at them across the good thing that will have been accomplished. How would it do, I wonder, if we went to some warm spot in the south—we could just manage to get there, perhaps—and then I tried to earn some money by painting portraits? Long ago, in Switzerland—it was in the first year of our marriage—we were staying at a mountain place, shivering with cold, and calling the man who built the rooms without fireplaces

an idiot, when one day a travelling artist turned up. Never dreaming that Arthur was of his own trade, he painted our portraits and the portraits of four or five other people in the hotel, for ten francs each, and then packed up his canvas, rolled it round with black American cloth, and went on his way as blithe as a swallow journeying south. Why should not I do that kind of thing? It would be very gipsy-like and independent. Perhaps I might take clothes enough in my pocket to give a hand to each of the children, or carry them on my back as I had suggested to Mrs. Marshall; or at any rate I might put them, and our luggage too, into a wheelbarrow and push it on in front. Arthur and I often used to sit and speculate on various ways of living, wondering out of which most happiness could be got.

"I should like a caravan," I remember saying to him once, "with brooms and brushes and baskets hanging outside, and a chimney-pot and smoke coming out of it; and inside

there should be a little bed to sleep in, and a little stove to cook at, and two seats, and a few pots and pans, packed so as neither to rattle nor to break; and you should lead the horse and crack a whip now and then, and I would sell our wares as we went along, to the folk who lived in out-of-the-way cottages and seldom went to town. And for dinner we would buy some meat, and when we had cooked it we would eat it in our little house, looking out at the sweet country-side the while; and at night we would draw up under a tree, and sleep soundly till the birds called us in the morning. It would be a glorious life, with no bills and no best clothes, and few amenities."

"Pleasant enough," said Arthur, thoughtfully; "but I think it would be a better thing to be a bargee—to sit all day long at the end of a barge, smoking a short pipe and swearing at the boy on the towing-path."

"But where should I be?"

"You should crouch down beside me, my darling," he answered. "You would like that?"

"Oh yes. I should hear so many wicked words; it would be delightful."

"The worst of it is," he went on, with a sigh, "that the spread of science and education together will, I fear, do away with the barge and the boy, perhaps even with the swearing."

I think of this merry talk now sadly enough, sitting alone with the vagabond longings rising up within me. But I must go upstairs and see my little one. It is never possible to stay away from her long.

She is in the nursery, sitting quite still, with an open picture-book in her lap, watching Jack, who is on the rocking-horse, singing as he rocks to an fro, and sharpening a pencil at the same time; the rein is twisted round his left hand.

"Molly doesn't care a bit about anything, mother," he says, "so I am singing to her."

So sweet a little voice has Jack; we always like to listen to him, and to look at his pretty round face while he sings.

"I am tired, mammy," Molly says; and, getting up, she clings to me and puts her head on my shoulder.

"My poor little darling," I say, and she nestles down close in my arms. "Do you know, my children," I tell them suddenly, "that you are going into a strange country soon?" My heart fails me as I think of the money; but the children are listening eagerly, so I go on without flinching. "Into a strange country, where it will be beautifully sunny and warm all through the winter."

"Perhaps we shall be able to pick flowers?" Molly says dreamily.

"Will there be any robbers or wild beasts?" Jack asks in the tone of one prepared to fight a legion.

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CHAPTER II.

I HAVE been trying to rest a little, lying on the sofa in my own room, but it is no good; my brain is in a whirl still. The nursery tea went up just now; it must be nearly five o'clock. Even a few minutes' sleep would help me to think better, but as it is I am dazed and useless.

The servant enters with a card. "Mr. Cohen, ma'am, and he hopes you'll be able to see him."

I would give the world not to do so, but cannot well refuse. He is an old friend and knew my husband well, and has been good-natured, and made people send their children to have their portraits painted in the days when commissions were few and far between. So I get up and smooth my hair and look

at myself in the wardrobe glass, for I am glad to do anything or think of anything save Molly, and yet she is not for a single moment out of my thoughts. And so I stand and look at myself in the glass. I was always slight and pale, but lately I have grown terribly thin and tired-looking, and there are black rings under my eyes that make me look ill. The only beauty left me is my hair. I have quantities of soft light hair. I hardly know what to do with it, and twist it round my head, and flatten it down, and vainly try to make it look prim and neat.

As I pass the nursery door I listen for a moment to the voices within. Jack is talking, but suddenly stops—to eat bread and jam, perhaps—and then Molly says, "Go on, Jack; do go on," in an eager voice.

"All right; wait a bit."

Molly may be too excited by Jack's conversation to eat, I think, so I put my head in at the door, and seeing that her face is hidden in her mug of milk, am satisfied. For

a moment everything swims. It is probably the worry of this strange day. And then I go downstairs to my visitor.

Mr. Cohen is a Jew, and never hesitates to proclaim it. The Jews are the finest people in the world, he says, and the oldest. Adam was a Jew; and when you talk to him about evolution, he says that if the theory is true, then the first man worthy of the name who was evolved was a Jew, and that the last man left in possession, when all the rest have died off, will be a Jew, and a triumphant proof of the survival of the fittest. "It is the best thing on earth to be a Jew, and the wisest to be proud of it," he said once in my hearing, to some one who was a little inclined to "chaff" him. So the chaff came to an untimely end, and he remained unruffled, conscious of having the best of it. He is a tall, dark young man, not very young, but by courtesy is called so, for he goes to dances, and is unmarried. He is like a sardine to look at; so very like a sardine—long and dark, and lank and oily. I

feel convinced that he sleeps in a tin box; there seems to be always a faint odour of spice about him. He is very rich, and knows it; you are constantly made aware that he knows it; yet he is good-hearted, pleased with himself and the world in general—a man who has never known worry, and never will know it. He is blessed with no strong feelings; has never been deeply in love, and never will be; thinks marriage would be a bore; and that "if anything does happen, and any one belonging to one chumps up, you know, why, it can't be helped; one must just put up with it." "Chumps up" means dies.

I feel cold and stiff and disagreeable as I enter. Perhaps he'll ask after Molly. I could not bear to tell him that she is ill. He would say, "What a bore. It's to be hoped she won't chump up," and laugh. His mother died two years ago. He told me of it, and laughed a little then. Perhaps it was only nervousness, for he had been a good kind son. If he laughed about Molly, I would never speak to him again; but

I will take care not to mention the children. He comes eagerly forward to meet me as I enter, and shakes my hand quickly, as if he were in a hurry.

"How do you do?" he says. "Why, you don't look up to much. Aren't you well?"

"Oh yes, thank you; I am quite well," I answer. "How are you?" and I sit down, and try to look interested in what he will say; but everything seems changed, and I am consciously acting a part.

"I know all about it," he says, as he takes the chair opposite to me. "You are bothered about the young 'un. Been to a wedding, and met Mrs. Marshall as I was coming away, and she told me you were up a tree, so I thought I'd come round."

He says it in the most cheerful tone, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for one's child to be ill, and for one's self to be up a tree, as he calls it. I am vexed with Mrs. Marshall for telling him, only I wonder that she remembered to do so, for she is

childless herself, and never seems to care for children.

"I am awfully sorry for you," the sardine goes on. I always call him the sardine in my thoughts.

"I know you are, of course," I answer gently; "but don't let us talk about it."

"What are you going to do?" he asks, taking no notice of my request.

"Going abroad."

"Awful bore that; interfere with your work, and cost a lot."

"Yes, I suppose it will," I answer, trying to speak cheerfully and feeling that it is a dismal failure. "But one must not think of that when one's child is in danger."

"No, of course not," he says, looking vacantly into space. Evidently he is not much concerned; but why on earth should he be? We are nothing to him. "Been busy lately?" he asks.

"Yes, pretty well," I answer, supposing that he has tired of the other subject already.

"Tell me what you have been doing," I add, determined to talk of other things.

"Not much," he says absently. "Nothing going on just now."

"You have been to a wedding?" Perhaps he would like to talk about that, I think.

"Yes." Evidently he doesn't care about it. He is very absent to-day.

"A pretty bride?" I ask the question mechanically, just to fill up time. If I could only get away to Molly!

"Yes; nothing out of the way. Bridegroom twenty years older—selfish beggar. Never saw him before, and didn't think much of him."

"But how do you know that he is selfish?"

"Always think a man is selfish who marries any one a lot younger than himself."

"But why?"

"Well, you see, he condemns the woman who cares about him to certain widowhood—that is, in the natural course of things. If she doesn't care about him, he is the means of making her look forward to a good time coming

when he will be out of the way and she will have the cash-box to herself, and that kind of thing spoils any woman's nature."

"Why, of course," I answer, beginning to be interested. "But they may care for each other very much, so much that for the sake of the present happiness she is willing to risk his dying first. After all, people don't always die in the order of their ages."

But the sardine is a man who thinks that if he has convictions it is his duty to stand by them, so he shakes his head.

"Don't believe in it," he says. "Not the kind of love that should be between husband and wife—can't be real chums and companions, and that sort of thing; they are on such different platforms, you know."

I can hardly believe that he has been thinking this out for himself.

"But surely——" I begin, and stop with a gasp, for suddenly there comes the pain that has so often worried me lately; it takes away my breath and makes me feel cold and sick for

a minute or two, and then leaves a dull sense of misery and weakness behind it. "But surely companionship——" and I am forced to stop again. If it gets worse I must speak to a doctor; but I am always ashamed to complain of my own aches and pains, and my heart is so full of memories and the children and of work, that I forget them unless they are actually on me. I sometimes think that people who have a great deal to do, and who have known much sorrow, are just a little beyond physical pain—a little farther away from it than others, as they are from little sorrows. Given the strong motive, tell me that at the other end I should meet my dear ones once again, and I could walk through hell's flames without flinching; nay, should almost find the burning sweet, as, let us hope, the martyrs did of old, because of the great happiness awaiting them at the end.

"I say!" the sardine exclaims. "You don't look well; lips as white as chalk. What's the matter?"

"Nothing," I answer. "Go on; the wedding——" and I feel the pain in an odd muffled way, as if it were wrapped in something, or had gone a little way off; and then I am conscious of looking at a little table opposite. "Go on; the wedding——" I hear myself saying as I might hear another person speak, and all things come forward and slip past me or under my feet, and something tight is round my heart—Molly. . . .

When I come to, Mr. Cohen is sitting by the sofa on which I am lying, a white pillow is under my head, a smelling-bottle on the little table.

"What is the matter?" I ask.

"Had a faint, that's all," he answers. "Do you often do that?"

"Why, no," I answer, in surprise. "I never had one before that I remember."

"Well, you had better take care of yourself as well as of the young 'un, or you'll chump up."

"That would be a bore," I say, getting up

from the sofa and trying to answer him in his own key, for I remember everything now.

"Awful bore," he says thoughtfully. "Who'd look after the young 'uns?"

And then suddenly I disgrace myself, for, without any seeming rhyme or reason, I feel a choking in my throat, and the hot tears in my eyes, and before I know anything more I am crying, there straight before him. I get back my self-control in a minute or two, and manage to laugh in what I hope is a merry, careless fashion. The poor sardine is evidently sorely puzzled what to do.

"I am very stupid," I say; "but indeed I can't help it."

"Oh no, you are not stupid," he says, in a kind, consoling voice, as if he did not exactly think that of me. "But don't cry; it's no good crying, you know."

"Oh no, it's no good crying," I echo.

"Of course you are not really going to chump up."

"It would be a good thing and real

economy," I say, "if every family did its dying all at once. If we three, all at the same moment, could creep into a cosy grave, I should be thankful and glad. Oh, I should be so glad that I believe I could get up and waltz with the tombstone."

"That would be a lark," he answers, evidently thinking of something else. Then he looks at his watch, and I wonder how long he has been here.

"I am afraid my fainting has prevented you from keeping some engagement," I say.

"Lots of time," he answers. "I have to dine out at eight. It's not six yet; must get to the club for half an hour, though. St. John's Wood is rather out of the beaten track, you see."

I wait a minute or two, hoping that he will get up to go, but he makes no sign. Then I wonder if he would like some tea. It would prolong his visit, but this tiresome time must have fatigued him.

"We might have some tea," I say, perhaps not too cordially and longing to be alone.

"That's an idea," he answers, with an air of relief; "I'll ring."

So the tea-things are brought in, and I make an effort to be cheerful and not to think of Molly, and to take no notice of the aching that is still going on in a dull, methodical way. While I make tea the sardine walks about the room, and looks at the paintings and the odds and ends of china.

"That picture of Grove's isn't up to much," he says.

"I like it," I answer.

"That's a good thing," he says cheerfully, as if he had feared I did not. "There's a little bit here, now, that rather takes my fancy;" and he looks at a tiny picture—a girl making lace, which an old schoolfellow gave me as a wedding gift. "Pretty little thing," he says, as he puts it back into its place. "Don't suppose it's worth anything, but the idea's pretty. I rather like it."

"Edith Clark gave it to me as a wedding present," I say. "It is pretty; Mr. Layton

once took a great fancy to it, and offered me twenty pounds for it."

"Why ever didn't you take it?" he asks, astonished. "It isn't worth that; it isn't worth five, I should say." The sardine has an idea that he knows a good deal about pictures.

"I know; but I am very fond of the girl who gave it to me. She is in India now."

"Yes, but twenty pounds. You might have given her half, and got her to paint another when she came back."

"She might never come back," I remark, as I put the water into the pot.

"Then she wouldn't know you had sold it. You'll want a lot of money to go abroad with," he tells me again, as he drinks his tea.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Made up your mind where to go?"

"Not yet, but south, of course," I answer. "We are to go to Dr. Finch again, and he will tell us."

"You know, a winter abroad costs an awful lot," he says, in the tone of a man who knows

all about it; "and one must do things comfortably, especially with an invalid. It runs into a lot of money."

"Of course it does," I say cheerfully, as if I do not mind in the least.

He gets up and walks uneasily about the room again, and suddenly sits down on a chair rather nearer to me than before, and begins in an awkward manner to hug his knee. Then he gets up and walks about again, and I notice that his face is a little flushed this last minute or two.

"Look here," he begins, clearing his throat, "you mustn't mind what I am going to say, Mrs. Keith. The fact is, I am awfully sorry for you about the young 'un. It does seem hard lines when you have just got things straight a bit. It struck me that this might have come rather suddenly, and I know going away will cost a lot; it always does. I'm an old traveller and know all about it, you see."

"Yes?"

"Well, you are not rich, and I am, though it doesn't do to own it always," he adds cautiously; "but I am, and I have no one loafing about and hanging on to me, and I wish you would let me be of some service to you——"

"Oh no, no," I begin. There is that in his tone and manner which makes it impossible to take offence, or to be anything but very grateful to him. I look up thankfully enough at the sardine, and feel what a good fellow he is, but I am not going to take his money.

"Why not?" he pleads. "My sisters are rich, but I am only saying to you what I should say to them if they were not. I am so sorry for you; it is very hard lines that this should come. It would do me lots of good, and make me awfully grateful if you'd—if you'd let me pay say four or five hundred pounds into your bankers, and you'd slide through the winter all right then."

Four or five hundred pounds!

"But, Mr. Cohen, I couldn't——" I begin gratefully enough; but he interrupts me, and hurries on.

"I don't mean as a loan; that would only hamper you—unless, of course, you would rather have it that way. I mean just as you accept it from your brother, or your sister, or a relation of any sort;" and he tries to laugh. "I never do any good, but if I helped to get your little chick right, I should feel set up in virtue for a long time to come."

"Oh, but I can't!" I cry, feeling that this money must be refused, though where else it will come from I cannot tell. "I am very grateful and will never forget your kindness, but I cannot accept it."

"Why not?" he asks, with a calm air of wonder, and there is an expression on his face that shows how hurt he is, and how vexed.

"I don't know," I falter, for it is all so sudden, and I have no reasons ready to hand. "I can't tell you. I never took money from any one except uncle Clement. It seems like

a confession of failure to take it. Of course it will be very difficult to manage this going; I don't know yet how it will be managed; but please don't——" And my tears begin to come again, and will not be stopped.

He waits for a minute or two, then gets up. "Well, look here," he says, "if you will, there it is. Think it over. If you like to pay me back, or to work it off in commissions when you come home, you can. Don't let the young 'un chump up for want of anything that's to be had for the asking."

"Oh no; I would beg first."

"You had better come to me before begging. After all, it is nothing to make a fuss about. I shouldn't miss it, you know; why, I should forget all about it in a fortnight." And he wrings my hand, and in another five minutes has gone.

The sardine's visit leaves me face to face with the money question. I stare blankly round the room, and a little shudder seems to overtake me as I wonder what I shall do. I

have refused help from the only person who is likely to give it. I have nothing in hand or to come beyond the few pounds in the house and the fifty pounds which will be due at Christmas, and out of that there are payments to make. There are a few pictures which might be sold to dealers; but they are not worth much, and they were gifts, and I should be sorry to part from them. We have no trinkets; nothing of any kind worth selling. We have no relations save a few cousins, and of these I know only one, and know her but slightly. There is no time to work before the date at which Dr. Finch says we should start, and yet we must go; it is not a case of "if" and "perhaps," but one of "must." This house may let, but it is very tiny, and would only suffice for one or two people; and though it is pretty, very pretty and artistic, yet many things which we are able to do without would have to be bought for a tenant, and at best it would not let for much. Oh, Molly, I wonder how it will all end. I go and look at the

picture, and wonder vaguely, as I have wondered half insanely many times before, if the people who sleep in the little churchyard sorrowed much, and if the people who are coming to the garden, the people who will gather the flowers and laugh beneath the blue sky, will be happy long. Happiness always seems to me to be like a traveller passing by, staying, perhaps, a little while here and a little while there, but having no abiding-place. Molly—— But I am very tired. Perhaps things will be clearer in the morning. I will creep upstairs and have a long sleep, with my little one in my arms.

CHAPTER III.

THE morning light has brought me to my senses. Last night I thought we had no money beyond what I have stated; this morning, with the sunshine coming into my room, and Molly asleep beside me, like a flash of lightning the remembrance of the hundred a year uncle Clement left us came to me. It is in the hands of trustees, but of course they will advance sufficient to take Molly abroad when they are told that it is a matter of life and death; it is only what uncle Clement would have wished. We shall be able to repay what we borrow; and as I am making more every year, the debt will not make much difference in our income. We shall not want a very large sum. Four or five hundred

pounds would be absurd; but perhaps we had better have two hundred, as there will be four of us, including nurse. We can bring back what we do not spend. Then, if this house does not let, we shall be safe; but the house must be let somehow. I turn and look at Molly. Her face is very thin, but in the sunshine I feel so strong myself it seems as if my strength is enough to save her, and in the south she will be able to run about all day, or to lie still in the sweet soft air and watch Jack. She is certain to get well; she must, she shall. Perhaps Dr. Finch took an over-gloomy view of things. He is a rather gloomy man.

This very morning I will go to the trustees, and then that matter will be settled. After wondering whether it would be better to go to Mr. Beccles or to Colonel Anson, I decide upon the former. So I get ready quickly, and half an hour after breakfast sally forth. It is a long way from St. John's Wood to Chancery Lane, but I walk more than half the distance

considering what to say. My heart sinks a little as at last I mount the stairs leading to the lawyer's office, my voice trembles when I ask for Mr. Beccles.

"He is out of town till to-morrow night," the clerk tells me. "He will be here again on Thursday," and to-day is Tuesday.

"I will come again on Thursday morning," I say, and turn wearily homewards.

It is twelve o'clock when I get back, perhaps later. The house is all in a commotion. Two hours ago nurse was sent for by her married daughter at Kingsland. She is very ill. They are afraid that it is scarlet fever, and nurse went off in a great state of mind. Poor nurse! it will worry her sadly, for this is her only daughter, and all her sons are away in Germany. Nurse is a good, kind, rather stupid old soul; but I have kept her because she is so fond of us all. She has spoilt the children, and she is not a good nurse or very careful in some ways, but that has not mattered, for I look after the children so much myself, and

she is so very kind to them that it has been easy to forgive her shortcomings.

But if her daughter really has scarlet fever, of course nurse will not be able to go with us, and so a new difficulty may arise. I cannot go alone with two children, for one may possibly want all my time, and it will be vexing to take a stranger. But, after all, this is a minor trouble, and will arrange itself, no doubt. There is the money to get, and packing to do, and getting ready in all ways to flit for six months. It is no good to sit and dream.

In the afternoon I go upstairs, and begin turning out. Poor old nurse, who no doubt is anxious enough, will probably want some of her clothes. I will pack them, and send them to her if she is not back by seven to-night; for if it is safe to come, she will certainly be here in time to put the children to bed. Suddenly it strikes me that there are some things in the cupboard that might be useful to her, for the daughter is very poor. In the medicine cupboard, too, there is some

eau-de-cologne. I get out the eau-de-cologne and look in at my little store of odds and ends. Some of these simple drugs must go to the south with us, and this bottle of chloroform for my neuralgia. Sometimes, when the pain is very worrying, I use a little of it until, dazed and stupid, I drop off to sleep; but I have had to be careful lately, for I fancied it affected my heart. I must get some more things to take abroad, for foreign drugs are seldom good. So many things there are to buy, and Molly shall have a little travelling-cloak, and a hood for her golden head; and Jack, too, must be made smart. They are pretty children; people are sure to admire them. I have found all the things nurse may want, and will pack them. Then my eye catches the bottle of chloroform again. It must on no account be left behind. There is always a difficulty in buying it, and something, I do not know what, makes me treasure up this bottle, in its olive wood case, very carefully.

That dear little rascal Jack is singing at the

top of his voice; but what is Molly doing? I go into the nursery, and find him on the rocking-horse, his head thrown back, his face aglow with excitement, shouting with all his might—

"A ship, a ship a-sailing, a-sailing on the sea,
And it is deeply laden with pretty things for me."

Molly is sitting in the armchair, watching her brother with the deepest admiration. She is always content to watch Jack, and to listen while he sings, but she never offers to join in any game. She is too glad to rest is little Molly.

"Don't make so much noise, my sonnie," I say; "you will give Molly a headache."

"Oh no, mother," Molly says, with a long drawn-out sigh of satisfaction. "I do so like to hear him. Go on, Jack;" and seeing that they are happy together, I leave them, while my bonnie boy's voice rings out joyfully—

"The four-and-twenty sailors who walk about the decks
Are four-and-twenty white mice with chains about their necks."

And while I am busy in my own room, the door opens, and there is nurse.

"Nurse!" I exclaim. "I am so glad to see you. Is your daughter well, then?"

The poor soul's eyes fill with tears. "No, ma'am; she is very bad," she answers.

Then a terror seizes me; for do we not all think of our own?

"Nurse," I say, "is it safe to come here? Are you sure she has not scarlet fever?"

"Yes, ma'am; it is quite safe," she says, in surprise. "I have not been in the room where she is for two hours. But I don't know what to do, ma'am; for they think she has got the fever, and I do want to be with her, ma'am, and I don't know what you'll do without your old nurse."

"Oh, nurse, go!" I cry, "and don't come here again until I give you leave. If you gave the children scarlet fever, you would never forgive yourself."

"I am sure, ma'am, I can't," she urges, in her broken English. "My daughter is only

just beginning, and perhaps it isn't scarlet fever, after all."

"Nurse, pray go away," I cry in despair. "I know you love the children."

"Yes, ma'am; that's why I am come, and for my things. I know you would not like me to stay away from my daughter when she is ill——"

"I am packing your clothes. Go outside and get into a cab; but no, you mustn't do that, or you will give it to some one else, perhaps. Go outside and wait, dear nurse. I will send your clothes out to you or bring them. I am so sorry for you, but you must not enter the house again until I give you leave, and——"

Suddenly hearing her voice, Jack runs out, and throws his arms round her neck.

"Nursee!" he exclaims. "Hulloa, old nursee."

"Go away!" I cry, trying to drag the child from her.

But he clings to her, and manages to

climb on to her back, and, with a shout of laughter, puts his arms tighter round her neck and his little bare legs round her waist, and suddenly that awful pain comes, and my strength fails, but only for a moment. With a great effort I force the pain back, and nurse and the child apart.

"Go away, mine dear," she says; "I'll be back soon again. I am sure, ma'am, it is safe. Won't you let me see Miss Molly again?" The woman must be mad, I think. She is a sturdy, kind-hearted German woman, who has never been ill and seldom out of temper in her life, and infection is a thing she looks upon as a popular delusion. "I wouldn't do her any harm for the world," she pleads; "you know I wouldn't, ma'am."

"Yes, I know you wouldn't," I say; "but for goodness sake, dear nurse, go away."

At last she leaves the house; and when her things are sent out to her, I rush upstairs and put Jack into a bath, and resolve that nurse shall never come back again. She is

good and kind-hearted, and would give her life for the children; but she is careless, and has lived her life free of aches and pains, and is a little sceptical of danger for others.

When Jack is rubbed and scrubbed and in fresh clothes, I laugh at my own fears and violence, for he must be safe now, and I go downstairs exhausted, and lie still upon the sofa for a little while. And then a bruise, which is oddly painful, and was done by a pole when we were getting the studio ready for my "at home," sets me suddenly thinking of some absurd troubles of my childhood. There was a little boy who used to come and stay next door to my father's house when I was a child, and he and I were playfellows. We were fond of each other, but we had terrible quarrels, and my arms were black and blue with the pinches he gave me, for my skin easily discolours. Then, when he found that the marks of his cruelty showed, he took to pinching my legs, so that I bitterly regretted having arrived at the age of stockings. Never did anyone or

anything pinch as he did, and yet we liked each other; and when at last he went away, I got up at six in the morning to say good-bye to him, and clambered up on the fence so that he might lean over and give me a parting kiss. I have never seen Ralph Bicknell since that chilly grey morning, but I have never forgotten his pinches.

No; it will never do to have nurse back, but some one else must be found at once to take her place. I will write to Mrs. Marshall, and ask if she knows of any one likely to do. On "Show Sunday" I heard her talking to a friend about some girl in whom she was interested. It vexed me at the time, for she seemed to care more for the girl than for the pictures, hardly looked at the latter, and forgot to say anything about them. That is a long while ago, but still she may know of some one. We must have a new nurse at once, for Jack is brimful of mischief and must be looked after, and there are so many things to do. So the note is written and sent off at once.

CHAPTER IV.

We have just finished breakfast. Mrs. Marshall only had my note last night, but she has come already, and is waiting in the drawing-room to see me. Probably she knows of some one likely to do as a nurse.

"I have had your note, and thought I had better come and see what could be done."

She says it grimly, as if she had resented my writing to her, but thought it her duty to help me. Her eyes look very round, her nose is very pointed, and she has brushed her grey hair back so tightly that her face looks harder than ever; her manner is cold, as it always is. I feel half afraid of her as she sits staring me in the face.

"It was a great shame to trouble you——"

"Not at all. Only, unluckily, I do not know of any one just now, but I will inquire." There is a silence for a minute, and then she goes on. "I came to see if you would trust the children to me in the daytime, as the nurse is gone. You must have a great deal to do."

"To you?" I say, half bewildered.

"I am very fond of children." She says it so harshly, and looks at me with her eyes so wide open that I am as much frightened as astonished, and forget to answer at all. "It is a great trouble to me that I have none of my own," she adds hurriedly; and the tears come suddenly into her eyes and trickle down her cheeks, but she does not seem to be conscious of her own distress. Hardly knowing what to do, I go a step nearer. As if she did not know it, she puts out her hand to push me back. She is a woman whom caresses rather annoy. I wonder what to say, and am afraid of saying anything.

"It is very kind——" I begin.

"Perhaps they would not like to come to me," she says sharply; and I fear that this is the truth.

It would be a great comfort to have a free time in which to pack and get ready, but Molly will certainly never consent to go, even for a few hours. Perhaps Jack would, and Molly is always content to lie on a sofa, or to be propped up in the corner of one, and look at a picture-book.

"The children are shy," I say hesitatingly.

"You would not be afraid to trust them to me?" she asks suspiciously.

"Oh no, no, indeed," I answer quickly, and this is true enough. Somehow I feel, too, that if she were alone with the children she would not be ashamed of being a little tender with them. Perhaps she is only hard and cold to grown-up folk, or chooses to pretend to be so. If we could look into people's hearts there would be a vast number of surprises for us.

"Perhaps you do not like to be without

them?" she remarks, in a polite and frigid manner. "But it might be more comfortable for them if they came to me while you are busy, and I would try to find them some amusement."

"Oh no, no," I answer quickly, feeling as if I had been reproved. All the time I am quite aware that I hate the thought of Molly being away all day.

"I will bring them back by four in the afternoon, and I could fetch them every morning."

"It is very kind of you," I begin once more, but she looks so hard I have not the courage to go on, or to say that I fear she will frighten them out of their wits. I remember Jack asking me once why she had such round eyes.

"Suppose we see what the children say to the idea?" she suggests; and they are sent for.

Molly runs up to me instantly. Jack hesitates for a moment, and then, in a business-like way, follows his sister to my side.

"Would you like to go home with me?"

Mrs. Marshall asks. "I would take you back in the carriage, and on the way we would stop and buy some toys."

Jack is interested, but does not move. Molly shrinks from the idea, and creeps up closer and holds me tight.

"There is a snow-white kitten at my house; don't you think you would like to come and play with it?" she adds.

"Wouldn't you, Molly darling?" I whisper; but she only shudders and clings closer.

"Oh no," she says, shaking her head; "can't leave mummy."

"But Mrs. Marshall will bring you back this afternoon, my pet," I say, meanly thankful in my heart that she will not go, for it is evident that nothing will tempt her away from me.

"Want to stay with you," she whispers, and there is no moving her.

Jack, however, is evidently wavering; Mrs. Marshall's gravity impresses him, he feels that what she says may be depended on. He

rubs his round, rosy cheek against mine, and says condescendingly—

"I don't mind going for a little while, but I shall want to come back to mother soon."

It is a great relief. It had seemed so ungracious to refuse her kindness altogether. Mrs. Marshall tries to follow up her advantage.

"And won't you come too, if Jack does?" she asks Molly. But Molly only shakes her head again, and stands by me stoutly. "Perhaps Jack would like to go to the Zoo, then, if Molly won't come. It would have fatigued her too much."

"I should like to go to the Zoo," Jack says, the delights of dissipation opening out before him.

"Perhaps he will stay a few days and be content," Mrs. Marshall suggests, when Jack has gone to be made ready. "There is a little room he can sleep in next to mine. I will telegraph if he is quite happy at the thought of staying. In two or three days you may have found a nurse."

So Jack goes off with Mrs. Marshall. He looks so pretty as he starts. He wears his little velvet suit, and, fearing lest he should feel chilly in an open carriage, Mrs. Marshall ties a blue silk handkerchief round his throat. "I brought it for Molly, thinking it would suit her," she says, in an apologetic voice. It suits Jack too, and my heart swells with pride as I look at him. He throws his arms round my neck, and then round Molly's, who has been watching him with admiration, not unmixed with awe, and then he runs gaily down the steps. He turns and shouts to me—

"Mummy dear, let Molly have my best paint-box, if she likes. She won't hurt it. Give her a good big painting rag, and tell her to wash the brushes well."

Unselfish little Jack, with the dash of practical common sense in him! Mrs. Marshall gets into the carriage after him, and waves her hand to me. There is a smile upon her face; she looks almost happy.

"Ah, poor dear," I think, as I watch them

out of sight; "there was a mother's love in your heart, and never a little one came to fetch it."

Then I go into the house and shut the door. It is very quiet without Jack. I realize that instantly, though Jack is not always in the house, nor always making a noise. How odd and still the place seems; Molly and I look at each other, and I know that we both feel lonely.

"Come and kiss me, mother," she says, and she clings to me, whispering, "You'll let me be with you all day, won't you?"

I take her in my arms and sit down with her, trying to clear my head of cobwebs, and to think over an idea that came to me this morning. When I said that we had no relations I meant that we had no near or intimate ones. We have some cousins, but, with one exception, I do not even know their addresses, and have never beheld them. The exception lives in London; she is married and well off. We used to know each other a little years ago; she some-

times went to see my father, but after he died we ceased to meet. She seemed to resent my marriage, because it was not a good one from a worldly point of view. The idea that has presented itself is that, after all, I will tell Alice Grey (what a pretty name it is) of the trouble that has come upon me. She is my cousin; why should I feel so certain of her want of sympathy?

"Molly, would you like to go out with mother?" I ask. She brightens at the words; and so an hour later we are looking our best, as folk who go to see their grand relations should; and drive in a hansom to Harley Street. Mrs. Grey is at home; we are shown into the drawing-room, and sit waiting for her, trying to forget that we are uncertain of our welcome. Oh dear, I think, as I look round at all the handsome things in the room, if these things were only ours, or even half of them were ours, I would sell them, and there would be no more difficulty about the money, and we would start on our journey south to-morrow.

"How do you do, Margaret?" Mrs. Grey says, and shakes hands, and very formally kisses me. "How do you do, dear?" to Molly, and she pats her cheek and sits down. We talk a little formal talk, and a quarter of an hour passes, and Mrs. Grey looks a little bored. I ask to see her children, and two pretty, well-behaved mites are brought in. As they leave the room, I ask if Molly may go back to the nursery for ten minutes. It is odd that she has not noticed that Molly looks ill. "Oh yes," she says, "Molly shall go to the nursery for ten minutes; and then I must send you away," she adds, "for I have some people coming to luncheon."

"Oh yes, we must go," I answer. "I have a great deal to do. I came to tell you," I say, when Molly has gone, "that Dr. Finch says Molly must winter abroad. She is very delicate —very; she is threatened with—with what killed dear mother." It is said calmly, thank goodness.

"How very trying," she says.

"Yes, it is very trying," I say drearily.

"I am sure it is," she answers.

"If Arthur had been alive——" I begin vaguely, not knowing how to go on.

"It was a pity that your marriage turned out so badly," she says, in a sympathetic voice.

"It did not turn out badly," I say, lifting up my head. "If Arthur had lived he would have been a great artist; there was the making of one in him."

"And of course you would have been very badly off if you had remained single, for poor Uncle Robert's pension died with him."

"I had other offers besides dear Arthur's," I say, rather indignantly, and not from any wish to boast, but because it seems rather insulting to Arthur to suppose that he married a girl no one else could have cared about, and to me to suppose that I married him for any reason except the right one. "I married him because we loved each other, and money isn't every-

thing." I am getting incoherent, but it does not matter.

"What I mean is, that I always think it is a pity to marry a man who has nothing to settle on you," she explains, as if she were in the habit of marrying at least once a year herself, and knew all about it. "Then, too," she continues, "I think it is a pity to marry a man who has no relations. If anything happens they are bound to look after you, to a certain extent."

"Not more than one's own relations, surely?" I say, rather astonished at the business-like eyes with which she looks at marriage all round.

"Oh yes, dear," she answers sweetly and softly. "When a woman marries, she belongs to her husband and to his people a great deal more than to any one else. I always feel that; indeed, I feel it so strongly that I consider myself bound to do a great deal more for my husband's family than for any member of my own. But tell me, where are you going?" she

says suddenly, thinking, perhaps, that she has given me a hint that may prevent possible trouble for the future.

"I don't know," I answer; "it is not settled."

"Of course, most people go to the Riviera; but it is fashionable and expensive."

"And we should be out of place among fashionable people."

"Yes, dear," she says compassionately, as if we were beggars, and went about in rags and tags, with packs on our backs. For some unknown reason, Alice Grey is making me angry.

"Malaga is a good place, I am told," she says, much more pleasantly, as if to make amends. "The Vincents are going to winter there this year. Some friends of theirs rave about it, and say it is the best climate in Europe. That might do for you, Margaret; Spain would be an interesting country to see."

"It is a long way off."

"And for that reason it may be cheap."

There is something in that, and I should like to see Spain.

"I wonder if many English go there?"

"It is a health-place, so probably they do."

"I want to paint some portraits, if possible, while we are away; it would help with expenses. I fear I should not get much to do at Malaga."

"It is impossible to say, of course;" and her voice is a shade more distant. I understand why: she is determined to have nothing to do with our arrangements. Perhaps she is afraid of my trying to borrow, so I promptly relieve her mind.

"It is a great comfort that uncle Clement left us some money, or wintering abroad would have been impossible."

"Of course it would," she answers cordially. She is evidently a good deal relieved. "Perhaps," she adds graciously, "if you do go to Malaga, you might like to know the Vincents. They are very pleasant people. And, by the way, I think you used to know Ralph Bicknell very well. You and he were children together, were you not?"

"Oh yes, we knew each other very well," I answer, and straightway think of his pinches. "What about him?"

"He is always supposed to be sweet on May Vincent, if he is ever sweet on any one except himself; but, as it has been going on for a long time, and nothing has come of it yet, it is probably all nonsense."

"What is he like?" I ask.

"Oh, he is rather good-looking, and—and——"

"Conceited?" I suggest, thinking of her previous remark.

"No, not exactly; but he rather gives himself airs, as if he thought himself an important person, and he is very fond of snubbing people."

The description makes me laugh. It is just what Ralph used to be, and yet there was a fascination about him. I wonder if it exists still.

"I should like to see him again," I say curiously. "It is so odd to hear of him after all these years."

"Well, probably you will see him if you go to Malaga, for I heard that he was going there with the Vincents. I suppose they like him. I think he is a very disagreeable person myself, and I believe he dislikes me. Luckily, tastes differ. But I am afraid I must send you away, Margaret," she says, in an apologetic tone, and looking at her watch. "If you do go to Malaga, and come across the Vincents, remember me to them. Good-bye, dear." She kisses Molly, who has been sent for, and kisses me, and forgets to say that she hopes it will do Molly good to winter south—forgets everything, except that she is very anxious to get rid of us.

CHAPTER V.

EVERYTHING looks so bright and hopeful this morning that even the remembrance of our visit to Alice Grey only amuses me. Last evening Molly sat on my lap till long after her bed-time, listening while I sang to her and thought the while of my own mother, who sang to me long years ago, and now is sleeping far away in the country churchyard. Molly, my little child, I wonder if you in your turn will some day sit and sing to your little ones when I too am taking my rest? There is nothing on this green earth left that could make me so happy as to know that. While I was still singing, a note came from Mrs. Marshall, following up the telegram she had sent earlier, saying that Jack was so

happy that she had kept him. He had been to the Zoo, and to-morrow was going to Richmond with her; the drive would do him good, and he would enjoy the run over the green in the park. Of course he will, dear little Jack; and how rosy he will look, running about under the trees. It is very kind of Mrs. Marshall to keep him, especially as no new nurse has appeared. Nurse's daughter has scarlet fever, and has it very badly, poor girl. The landlady of the house had had it and concealed it. What a wicked thing to do, and what a narrow escape Jack has had.

This morning I am going to take Molly again to Dr. Finch, and afterwards mean to go to Chancery Lane, to get over my interview with Mr. Beccles. I am very cheerful about both visits. Molly looks so much better, perhaps Dr. Finch will say there is no necessity to go abroad, after all.

This hope is soon dashed to the ground. The great doctor examines her very carefully, and sits watching me while I put on her

wraps afterwards. He waits till she has gone home with the housemaid before he speaks.

"Do you think you really can manage to take her away for the winter, Mrs. Keith?" He puts the question in this considerate form, for he knows my position and circumstances.

"Yes, I can manage it, if it is necessary," I answer resolutely, determined that nothing shall stand in the way, if going is likely to make her well.

"It *is* necessary. It may save her; but remember, I don't say that it will," he says gently.

"Is she so very ill?" I ask. My heart seems to be getting stone cold, but my voice is firm.

"She is in a very critical condition. It is possible that change of climate may save her. I have more faith in that than in anything else."

"Where shall we go?"

"Have you any friends in the south of France whom you could be near?"

"No, none," I answer. "I have heard of some people, friends of a cousin's, going to Malaga. Would that do?"

"Excellent. It is one of the best climates in Europe, and there is a good English doctor there. Let me see, what is he called? Murray —Dr. Murray. I should not have sent you so far, but you could not go to a better place."

"Then we will go there;" and I get up.

"Take heart," he says kindly, "and try to make up your mind that she will get well, for that is something towards it."

I look up at him and try to speak, but my lips seem to have lost their power. We shake hands, and frozen and dazed and strange, I start for Chancery Lane. How odd it is. I am like another person again, carrying my old self about like a puppet. It is very interesting to look on at all that she does, and so very strange.

It is twelve o'clock when I get to the lawyer's office. He is engaged, but will see

me if I will wait for half an hour. So I wait, while my courage ebbs away behind the advertisement sheet of the *Times*, and the clerks scratch away at their desks. Perhaps it is the squeaking of their quills that affects my nerves, or the naked ugliness of the room, or the row of tin boxes on the shelves opposite, with the owners' names painted on them in hard white letters; I don't know, but when I enter the room consecrated to Mr. Beccles and private interviews, I can scarcely drag one foot after the other.

"How do you do, Mrs. Keith; how do you do? Sit down;" and he looks at me inquiringly.

"How do you do?" and I sit down. "I came to see you the other day, but you were away." There is no object in telling him this, except to gain time.

"I am so sorry; it was a long way to come. I trust it was not anything very important, my dear lady?"

He is always gentle and sympathetic, but

under the gentle, sympathetic manner one feels that he is cold and hard. It is like a stone wall covered by a coating of soft green moss.

"It was not pressing for the moment, but I am much relieved to see you to-day." There is a lump coming in my throat; suppose, after all, he refuses to let us have the money? but he cannot; it is ours. "I have come to see you on business," I begin rather tamely, and he bows. "My little girl is ill—she is very ill. She is threatened by the same disease that killed my mother"—the tears are coming into my eyes, but I force them back—"and——" I can't go on.

"She'll outgrow it, my dear lady, depend upon it," he answers feelingly. "So young a child."

"I hope so," I say hopelessly; "but the doctor—Dr. Finch, you know; I have been to him—says that she must go to a warm climate for the winter; that it is her only chance, in fact." I stop for a moment, but he is silent. "And so I want to raise the money to go."

He bows, but does not look encouraging. "And as you are one of my trustees, I have come to ask you"—oh, how the words stick in my throat,—"to—to let us have two hundred pounds of the money uncle Clement left us, or we shall not be able to manage it. I suppose you will not mind?"

"I don't quite understand," he says, and I explain. "But the trustees have no power to advance it; it is tied up," he says. "It is quite out of our power."

"Out of your power?"

"Quite out of our power. The money is settled upon you for life, only the interest is yours. At your death the capital will be your son's. You can't touch your son's property; it would not be legal."

"But you know that, under the circumstances, uncle Clement would have wished it; and when my son is a man he will hate to think that this money could not be used even to save his sister's life."

"Ah yes, my dear lady; but we have to

abide by the law, which often runs counter to matters of feeling."

"Then that is hopeless," I say despairingly. "I see what you mean, but it never struck me before."

"So few ladies know anything about legal matters," he says benevolently.

I sit still for a moment, turning over in my mind every possible way of getting the money. It is no use selling the things at home; they certainly would not realize fifty pounds. Suddenly an idea strikes me.

"Would not some one advance us two years' income? If I could borrow the two hundred pounds, paying back a hundred this year and a hundred next year, and the interest the third year"—somehow the arrangement with the interest in the tail sounds a little lame, but it would surely be a very safe arrangement, and Mr. Beccles himself, as trustee, would be able to ensure repayment—"we could borrow it on those terms, perhaps?"

"I think not," he says sadly, shaking his

head. "You must forgive my saying it," he goes on, "but I do not believe in going abroad. It is a new-fangled idea, this chasing people out of their own country. If your child is well enough to recover, take care of her, and she will do so at home. If she is unhappily too far gone to get well here, she will not do so in a foreign land."

There is some common sense in what he says; but for all that, he is no more an authority on medical matters than Dr. Finch is on legal ones. I have had the best advice for Molly, and am bound to follow it, and I struggle hard to answer back in a practical tone, and from the common-sense point of view also.

"But whatever even I may think about the matter myself, Mr. Beccles, a great doctor has said that taking her abroad may save her, and I am bound to try it."

He gives his shoulders a little shrug, and says nothing.

"And you think no one—no one would lend us the money?"

"I fear not," he says, as though it grieved him sorely to say it.

"Not if the hundred a year were devoted to repaying it? I could do with even less than two hundred, I dare say."

"I fear not," he repeats, in the same compassionate voice. "It is not as if the money were absolutely your own."

Then I give up hope as far as he is concerned, and get up heartsick and indignant, for Mr. Beccles is very rich, and I think of his grand house and the servants and carriages, and the thousand pounds uncle Clement left him, and the life-long friendship he had shown him. To Mr. Beccles two hundred pounds would not have been a large sum to help the niece of his old friend to borrow. But what is the use of all this bitterness? I will go back to Molly.

"The world is very selfish," I say sadly.

"It is indeed," he answers, with a sigh, as though he and the world were far, far apart.

Suddenly something prompts me to ask,

"What will become of the money uncle Clement left if my son dies under age?"

"It would still, of course, be yours for life, and you would have the disposal of half the capital at your death."

"And if both children die before or after me, but yet under age, what then?"

"The whole of it would go at your death as you by will direct. You ought to make a will, Mrs. Keith, in case both the children die under age, and yet survive you. It might save complications hereafter."

"Thank you," I say, and remember with a thankful heart that my little son is strong and healthy enough. I wish there was some provision for Molly, but I am not likely to die, and am glad enough to work. It seems to me, as I walk back down Chancery Lane, that the only hopeless foe in the world is Death. Sorrow, and sickness, and poverty, and change, and even sin—all these things may cost us bitterest pain, but at least they can be fought, and round any corner of even the darkest road

hope may be lurking or some surprise awaiting us. But Death! Never since the world began, and never to the end, will the man be found who can bring the dead to life.

I get home at last, and enter the drawing-room gently. There on the sofa, covered by an Indian blanket, her little face resting on the white pillow, is Molly. In her eyes is a burning brightness, on her cheeks are two red spots; her lips are crimson, and I know that they are burning too. She half raises her head, and all her dear face lights up.

"Oh, mother," she says, "I am so glad you have come back. I thought you never would. I do feel so tired; I think it was that nasty cab coming from the doctor's."

"My darling," I say, kneeling down by the sofa.

"I wanted to be in your room, and not in the nursery, as Jack is away, so Bessie put me here. You don't mind, do you mammy dear?"

"Mind?" I cry. "Oh, my sweet darling,

my own little child!" and I smother her with wild kisses. She kisses me eagerly back for a minute, and then pushes me away—Molly, who has never before tired of being caressed.

"I can't breathe, mother dear," she says, and pushes me still farther away.

"Lie still a little while, my darling," I say, and stagger to the writing-table, and, taking a form from a drawer, write out a telegram: "*Please come to me to-day, if possible, at any time convenient to you,*" and direct it to Frederic Cohen, Esq. I ring and send it off; and then, while the child is still watching me with her star-like eyes, I walk up and down, wondering what he will say when he gets it, and where Molly will die, and whether he spells his first name with a *k* at the end or not, and why I did not merely put the initial, and then I wonder why he is a Jew. What a fool I am, though, for what has that to do with it? and the pain threatens, and I laugh at it, and somehow it vanishes; and Molly calls to me from the sofa, and I go and put my face

down on her soft hair that is the colour of sunshine—ah, God! of the sunshine that perhaps will be shining down upon her grave a few months hence. Oh, but I am going mad.

CHAPTER VI.

It is late in the afternoon when Mr. Cohen comes. I hear him drive up in a hansom, and my pulse beats quicker as he knocks at the street door. He looks particularly good-tempered and pleased as he enters; his manner is a little eager, as if he had unexpectedly gained a difficult point.

"How do you do?" he says, in his most cheerful voice. "Had your telegram all right, you see, and am very sorry I couldn't get away before. Dreadful thing to be a city man, you know. Keeps one busy just when one wants some time to one's self."

"It is very good of you to come at all," I say. "It was very cool to telegraph for you in that way."

"It was quite right. Well?"

"Well?" I echo, for I can't speak of what I sent to tell him.

"Is it all right?"

"Is what all right?" I ask.

"Going to be sensible?" he says, in a kind, manly fashion that reassures me and sets all my doubts at rest. I answer with a little nod, for words fail me. He takes my hand and gives it a good shake. "That's the best way. I knew you were a wise little woman, or I shouldn't have said anything about it. I am only treating you as I should one of my own sisters, so don't go having any more scruples, and that sort of thing. How shall we manage it? Look here, I'll pay it into your bankers if you'll tell me where. They'll think it's a commission, and the price of pictures gone up."

Then I find a voice, and tell him of my visit to Mr. Beccles. It rather amuses him.

"Of course he couldn't advance you any money, if it is tied up on the boy," he says; "it would be a felony, or something. Fancy

trying to incite a respectable lawyer to commit a felony, and get himself put into prison!"

"Then I wondered if I were to sell the things here, to help, at any rate, towards expenses,—" I begin.

"Get nothing for them, and have to start again when you come back."

Then I explain that I am only going to borrow two hundred, and shall repay that out of the hundred a year, fifty pounds a year at least, until it is paid off; and that I am going to make a will to try and secure the money to him as far as I can in case of my death. He laughs, and seems to be vastly amused.

"All right," he says; "but we'll make it four hundred, and then I shall be able to dun you a little longer. You really can't do it for less; couldn't do it myself on that, and you'll have the children and maids and people."

"I don't travel with a regular suite."

"Don't you?" he laughs. "Well, we'll make it four hundred. I like having my way,

so that's settled. Don't let's talk of it any more. Money affairs are always awkward, you know. Are you going to give me some tea again?"

The things have been brought in, but I had forgotten all about making it.

"I am so stupid to-day," I apologize.

"Never mind," he says consolingly. "Had any more faints since I was here?"

"No," I answer, trying to laugh; for the sardine generally looks bored if one is not a little bit lively. Besides, it is a great relief to know that the money is settled. I had not realized what a load it was on my mind till my friend came and lifted it. It will not be difficult to pay it off.

"Is the young 'un getting on?" he asks.

I shake my head, and he avoids the subject.

"Made up your mind where to go?"

"We are going to Malaga."

"That's a pretty good journey. Why, it's an awful way. What are you going to Malaga for?"

"The climate is said to be good. There is a clever English doctor there; and some friends of my cousin's, Mrs. Grey, will be there, and we may possibly know them. It will be interesting to see Spain too. I have always longed to go there."

"Lots of beggars."

"And grandees."

"I never saw any grandees, and don't believe they've got any left. If they have, they keep them done up in dirty cotton wool."

"Why dirty cotton wool?" I ask, in surprise.

"They have nothing clean in that country," he says sadly, shaking his head.

"You don't seem to admire the Spaniards."

"No, I don't. We have had some business dealings with them, and know a good deal about them. They really have got a decent climate, though—dry as a bone; for they cut down all the trees, and do away with the rainfall. You see, they don't want water in that country; they drink wine, and never

wash themselves. Water is quite useless, so they have abolished it."

"But the ground, at any rate, wants watering."

"Not a bit of it. They don't grow anything except prickly pears. Nothing there but acres and acres of barren land. It never wants watering any more than the people."

"It does not sound as if it will be a good place for us," I say, in surprise.

"Oh yes, it will; it has a wonderful climate," he says, as he drinks his tea. "Much better than the Riviera, or any of those places. There's never any telling at what moment a wind may turn up on the Riviera and nip the life out of you. Spain is the best place this side the Mediterranean. I dare say you'll be able to do some painting there. Plenty of English—— By the way, how are you going to get there?"

"I don't know. It has only just been settled that we are to go. I have not thought about routes yet."

"It's an awfully long journey by rail."

"Well, we can't go by sea."

"It would be a bore; but an idea has just struck me. You might get through very comfortably to Marseille, and go on from there by sea. Very short journey; much easier than going by rail. There are some English boats from Marseille that call at Malaga on their way home. They stop there once a week, and I could write to our people, and tell them to look after you."

"I don't understand;" but I remember that the sardine is a merchant, and has dealings with foreign countries; the boats have probably something to do with his business. He explains.

"You see, we have branch places out in the East, and so have a considerable interest in some boats that do our fetching and carrying between Bordeaux and places farther off. They are very comfortable, used to passengers, generally have a good many. Went in one of them myself once, so know all about it. I'll

write them a line to Marseille, to say they are to look after you and take you on to Malaga,—charge you nothing, of course. A clear saving that, and pleasant way of getting there."

"It would be very nice," I say gratefully. "You have been a good friend to us, Mr. Cohen. What should we have done without you? I should have died, I think."

"Well, dying wouldn't have helped much; rather the other way, in fact," he answers. "It's lucky I met Mrs. Marshall that day, or I shouldn't have known anything about it. That would have been very bad luck."

"For me, yes, indeed," I answer; for I have put all my scruples away, and, more thankful than words can tell for the sardine's generosity, give myself up to such comfort in it as I may find.

"I meant for me; wasn't thinking of you just then," he laughs.

"Very, very much worse luck for me," I say gaily, doing my best to be lively.

"Well, we won't nag at each other about it," he answers.

"It seems such an amazing thing—— Oh, but I was going to say a very rude thing indeed."

"What was it? Rather like rude things."

"I was going to say that one does not expect a Jew to be so generous as you have been to me. He has the reputation of taking care of himself and his own people, but of being, in regard to others, very—very——"

But the sardine, who is never offended at plain speaking, answers quickly, with a certain pride of race in his voice.

"If a Jew considers himself really to be your friend and you his, then he thinks himself bound to do anything he can for you; that is, if you are up a real tree, and don't make too much fuss. A Jew hates a fuss. If you are merely in a bush, and could get out again if you liked and really tried, and are merely crying out to amuse yourself, then the Jew passes on, and thinks time and money too valuable to waste on you."

"I quite understand. It is a right principle."

"And then," the sardine continues, "a Jew always considers himself bound to look after women and children as far as he can; that is, his own womenfolk, or the womenfolk of his friends."

"It is a great comfort for the women. It just occurs to me that I never heard of a Jewess going in for woman's rights."

"Oh no," he says, shaking his head; "our women never do that kind of thing. They are too well educated and taken care of, and they know when they are well off."

"And so they don't want 'rights'?"

"Oh no," he answers solemnly. "They are very well off as they are, and they know it. We never expect our women to be dummies, and we know they are not fools, and we always consult them about things that concern them; that's all they want, you know."

"And then, you are proud of them. I have so often noticed that."

"Of course we are proud of them. We

ought to be; for you can't match them. That's why we like taking them about with us, instead of leaving them at home; besides, we think women have as much right to enjoy themselves and go about as men. That's what your people don't seem to see, and then the women cry out. You don't understand that a woman likes being treated properly and yet taken care of at the same time."

"And you do understand it," I say.

"Yes, we do; and we know that we can do with fewer things than women can, and we take care that they get more accordingly. On the whole, our women have a very good time."

"And don't you think ours have?"

"Some of you; some of you haven't;" and he gets up and walks about the room, looking at the things again. He stops before the picture on the easel. "I don't think anything of that picture," he says; "don't believe any dealer in London would give you ten pounds for it."

"Don't abuse it. It was so kind of him to give it to me."

"I like this little thing much better," he says, going up to Edith Clark's little painting.

Suddenly an idea strikes me. "Let me give it to you," I say eagerly. "I should so like you to have it; do take it;" and I try to put it into his hands, but he pushes it away.

"Oh no; wouldn't take it for the world. Why, you refused twenty pounds for it."

"I know, but I should so like to give it to you."

"Can't be done," he says, shaking his head. "It looks so well where it is. You mustn't go wanting to give away your valuables like that."

"Oh, but think of all you have done for me. It would please me so if you would have it, Mr. Cohen." But he shakes his head again.

"You shall leave it to me in that wonderful will you are going to make," he says; "then, when you are about to chump up, it will be

a comfort to you to know that I am going to get it."

"I'll give it to you for a wedding gift when you get married."

"Very well. You'll have to wait a good while first."

"I am sorry for that," I say.

He looks quite pleased. "Oh, come, now, don't begin about that. Every one is always at me. You women are never content unless you are match-making."

"I think you ought to be married," I say, with all my heart. "You would be so good to your wife, and she would be very proud of you."

"Don't see what she would have to be proud of," he says; but there is something in his voice that almost tells one that he is thinking of his balance at his banker's with satisfaction, and reflecting that it isn't such a bad thing to be proud of, after all.

"But, really," I say earnestly, for I know that he likes to be asked about it, "why don't you get married?"

"Never see any one I care quite enough about. There was a little girl once who might have done; but she didn't seem to see it, so I cleared off."

"Why didn't she see it?"

"I don't know; I thought she did at first. She had an unfortunate relation in the shape of an aunt, who objected to me—had larger views, I think, so I left her to contemplate them. That aunt was too much of a mill-stone for any girl's neck. She was a nice little girl"—and he almost sighs—"nice, gentle little thing; would have suited me down to the ground."

"Perhaps it will come all right yet."

"Oh no; just as well it shouldn't. After all, you know, it's a fearful business getting married."

"Yes, it is; but there's nothing in this wide world like it if you get the right person."

"And there's nothing in this wide world like it if you get the wrong one," he laughs. "I must go, Mrs. Keith. You won't start for

another week or two, I expect. I am going to Scotland for ten days or so, but I shall come and see you before you start. I am very glad we have made up our little differences. I'll make it all right about—about that." He shrinks from even naming the money, the good, kind sardine, though he has written down the name of the bank in his pocket-book. "I'll write to Marseille, and tell them they are to look after my aunt and her family when they turn up, and take them on to Malaga."

"Your aunt?"

"Yes; my aunt or cousins or something like that, you know. There's nothing like a capacity for lying to a moderate extent—so useful. Let me see, now; any other business? Oh, I'll find out what day the boat gets there, and drop you a line, and you can start accordingly. It would be a great bore for you to be staying too long at Marseille."

"Why, Mr. Cohen, you seem to have adopted us. I wish I understood business as well as you do, and could arrange things." I

sigh. I am getting very tired, and long to be with my little child again."

"A good thing you can't," he says fervently. "I hate business women myself, and always leave them to take care of themselves. I like women to be clever and suggestive and full of resources, and plucky, and a trifle helpless;" and, having explained his views regarding women to his own satisfaction, the sardine departs, and as the door closes I fly up the nursery stairs, and taking Molly in my arms, walk up and down the room with her. It is very quiet without Jack. He has been gone these two days, and all the house seems to be aching for a sight of him.

What a comfort it is to sit down and think over the sardine's kindness. I have no longer any feeling about borrowing the money, except that of being very grateful to him, and a sense of safety at knowing that I have a friend in the world so staunch and generous. I like to think of his manner to-day, of the happiness it gave him to help us, of the

delicacy with which he avoided talking of it more than he could help, and how he seemed to shrink from even mentioning the word "money." At heart he is just a perfect gentleman, whatever he may choose to make his manner; I am glad to have taken his help, and am proud of it.

After Molly is in bed I pack up a little parcel for nurse, and write and implore the dear old careless soul not to come until she has leave. Then I sit down with a drawer full of children's clothes before me, and begin to look over and mend them before packing them into a travelling-case. Now that nurse has gone there are so many extra things to do. It is rather nice to mend Jack's clothes, the bonnie, sturdy little sonnie; all his pockets are torn. I long to see his face again; perhaps I shall get another little note from Mrs. Marshall presently, though one came this morning, full of praise and little anecdotes about him. Just these few hours since the money business has been settled there has

been a little lull in the storm, as if, with the means of trying the one thing that would do Molly good, a half-promise from some strange power had come that she should get well. It is very odd, but it seems lately as if with Molly's illness more strength had come to me, so that I can see and hear and feel more acutely, and my hands long to touch the brushes again. Perhaps out of one strong feeling another is growing, and in the future my hands will do better work than they have yet done. A thousand things suggest themselves all at once, and I long to be at work, and feel that I could work well. The thought of the sardine's goodness will help me; the debt shall soon be paid: and yet I shall be almost sorry when it is; it is nice to have so generous a creditor.

There is a double knock at the street door. The sound half amuses me. It is a shy, half-frightened knock; probably a nurse applying for the place, for I do not know any one likely to come at this hour of the evening. I think

quickly of Molly sleeping above, and hastily kiss the hole in Jack's sleeve, and go to the room door and listen. There is some one speaking in a low voice.

"No, I will not come in," I hear, as with a heart that suddenly stands still I recognize the hard but broken tones; "ask Mrs. Keith if she will come out and speak to me." It is Mrs. Marshall. Oh, what does it mean! Jack——

* * * * *

CHAPTER VII.

THE morning light is coming once again. I can see the tops of the houses opposite, and the trees are no longer a confused mass in the darkness, but are green and almost separate. This is the third night that I have walked up and down, wondering if in the morning I should still be sane. If I might only be with him and nurse him and watch him, and see each change, each hope and fear that comes and goes, then I could be calm and silent and show no sign. But here alone, away from him, with the caged feeling, the doors closed between him and me—between me and the room in which he lies and calls for me perhaps, and longs for me, and yet no mother is there with him—here away from him I have no control. If I could

only keep my wild heart still and take things calmly as some women do who perhaps love as well as I. But no, but no, these little ones are all I have; the touch of their little hands goes through me, and every nerve answers to the sound of their voices or the sight of their faces. Oh but to keep them! To live and bear the cruellest pain, to slave day and night and know no rest, to be cut off from everything and every one, yet keep these little ones, and I would be satisfied; or if death must come, let it come to me. To die the saddest, loneliest death I would find sweet, if only they might grow up and be strong and find good life in the world.

Jack has scarlet fever; they doubt if he can live. Oh, nurse, will you ever forgive yourself? Even in the midst of all my misery I am sorry for you, poor soul.

He is at Mrs. Marshall's still. They have been goodness itself, and he has had the best of doctors and of nurses, and everything that money could do or love devise; but I have not

seen him, they will not let me, and it is driving me mad. They say I might take it, or give it to Molly, but I am not incautious like nurse. They say I could do him no good, but ah! he'll die. I know it. I crept to the door at twelve o'clock last night to ask how he was, and to beg them to let me in. He was no better; that is what they always say—no better. To-day I *must* see him; I must indeed. There is a little housemaid here who loves and is very good to Molly, and I will take fresh clothes with me, and walk long miles, and do all the things that are wise to prevent infection. Doctors do not take it; why should I?

It is getting lighter; another hour, and I may go to the house and ask again. Sleep on, Molly; sleep on, my little child. Ah, the blessed hours that children sleep through, while those who love them wake and sorrow! There is the rocking-horse in the nursery. It kills me to see it, and yet something makes my quaking heart and reluctant feet take me again and again to it,

and I stand and watch it, wondering if some sense of what is coming has crept over it, and the room, and all that is in it, for there is an air of parting and desolation and sorrow over everything.

"The four-and-twenty sailors that walk about the decks
Are four-and-twenty white mice with chains about their necks."

It rings in my head as I walk up and down; I stand still and begin to sing it, but stop with a little cry of fright at my own voice, and put my hands over my mouth.

It is time at last; I take the portmanteau with the change of clothes, and, kissing Molly gently as she lies sleeping, start for Mrs. Marshall's. How many times I have driven from St. John's Wood to Kensington these last few days! Even the streets as I pass along seem sullen and sad and sorry for him.

The servant opens the door gently. My lips refuse to speak, but she knows what I want to ask.

"He is just the same," she says. "Will you come in?"

I have never been admitted before, but now, dazed and wondering, I enter. In a few minutes Mrs. Marshall comes to me in the drawing-room.

"He is just the same," she repeats, in a sad voice, and with a look of misery on her face which I see even in the midst of my own dread.

"Let me see him," I plead; "do let me see him. He is my own child. I cannot bear it. I know how well you mean it; but oh, let me see him, do let me see him."

She takes my hands and forces me back on to the sofa, and, still holding them, speaks.

"You can do no good," she says gently. "You may take it yourself, or give it to the other child."

"But you have seen him. Why should I take it more than you?"

"And if I do," she answers, in her hard,

grinding voice, "my life is not so valuable as yours."

"Oh yes; you have your husband." But she does not answer, and the words seem to have been spoken into some dreary waste in which they can have no meaning.

"Tell me how he is again," I plead. "Is he any better?" She holds my hand still more tightly and answers.

"I must not deceive you, my poor dear; he is not any better." . . . . .

. . . . . .

They let me see him. . . . I took him in my arms and kissed him. . . . I think he knew me; then he said, "Where is mother? I do want mother so. Where's mummy?" . . . oh, Jack . . . oh, Jack. . . .

* * * * *

So many times lately I have thought that it would be very lonely for him sleeping out there all alone in the stillness and darkness, and we far away. How cruel it seemed to go and leave him! But now Jack is with him. Ah,

my little son, how good it must be to be there; and how soundly you will sleep on through all the ages. If I were only with you. . . . But there is Molly. . . .

CHAPTER VIII.

DID you ever sit alone after some terrible storm in your life had passed and left you blankly staring the future in the face, half wondering, half doubting that you were living still, and think sadly over your old day-dreams? —the things that years ago you had meant to do in the happy days to come, things that seemed as if they would be so easy and pleasant, and so certain to wait on time and opportunity? I sit thinking over my old dreams this afternoon, here in the little drawing-room once more.

To-morrow we start for Malaga, Molly and I. I wonder when we shall return, or if either of us will? This house is let to a young married couple. He is an artist. It is rather a comfort to me that he is; it seems natural

that he should come to live and work here. They both appeared to like the little bits of rubbish about the place—the sketches, and the pots and pans and plants; but they did not appreciate the poor picture on the easel any more than the sardine did. Yet to me it has always been so strangely pathetic, and now I seem to know what it all means. It dawned upon me while the little bride and her husband were here the other day, going through the rooms with merry laughter, thinking how cosy they would be in our little home. They laughed at the rocking-horse, and the bride stroked it, and said it was a "dear big beast," like one she had had at home, and then they both laughed; and while they were laughing, I was forcing back my tears, and listening to a voice, the merriest voice that ever mother's heart answered to, singing—

"The four-and-twenty sailors that walk about the decks."

When they had made their arrangements, in the careless, happy-go-lucky fashion of youth

and belief in the world, and had gone away, then I sat thinking of the picture, as I had many times before. Now I understood it, and knew what the dead people sleeping over the hill had looked like; how they had laughed, and cried, and hoped, and sorrowed; and how thankful they had been to lay their heads down at last. The waves had gone on dashing over the shingly beach year after year towards the garden wall; the seaweed had been heaped up here and there higher and higher, and then the pitiful sea took it back again; and farther up I saw the flowers dying, and heard the last hum of birds and bees, and knew when the swallows had journeyed south, and quiet and silence and forgetfulness reigned over all, and the tired ones slept soundly. But now all was changing. The birds were singing again, and the sun shining, and soon the flowers would bloom, and all around would be alive and happy, "bright with a summer to be." But the sleepers over the hill would know nothing and care nothing; for what would it matter

to them to whom nothing would matter more?

"We will take it for a couple of years, if you like, Mrs. Keith," the husband said, as he followed his bride out of the house; so we may be wanderers for as long as we please.

Only a year ago—nay, less, last winter—I sat many a long hour thinking how happy the children should be as they grew up, what merry days they should have to remember, to what bright ones they should look forward. It is a good thing to have a happy childhood: it keeps the heart green through all after troubles; it sends a little perpetual current of youth through a whole life. My children should have this at least. It seemed such a blessed thing to have these two little lives, and I used to think that if I brought them up to be good and true and pure and above all selfishness, it would be good work enough. For every woman who gives to the world even one sweet woman or one good citizen, has

given it something in return for all it has given her. So many plans I made in those happy dreaming hours, thinking how in the long evenings I would tell them fairy stories, till quite gradually they learnt to like best to hear stories that were true; and then, just as Mazzini advised mothers to do in the twilight hour, I would tell them stories "of great men who had worked and loved the people." It has been something to imagine their little upturned faces, and to see by the firelight the eagerness in their eyes. . . .

But it is useless to go over it all, and I must not break down, for there are many things to do yet, and at nine o'clock to-morrow morning we start. The sardine was coming to say good-bye, but telegraphed just now that he was prevented, and would meet us at the station in the morning to see us off; so one of the two people who have been so kind to us will see the last of us, and the other is coming this afternoon.

Mr. Beccles wrote after Jack died, and said

he could raise the money now that a reasonable security was possible. But I felt that Mr. Cohen would be sorely disappointed if his help were, after all, not taken; so I refused Mr. Beccles, and felt some satisfaction in doing it. I have made the will at which the sardine laughed, and left him the little picture he liked, and arranged for the repayment of the debt; and then, if Molly does not survive me or dies under age, all there is will be divided between the only two friends we possessed in the world.

All this I have been thinking over, sitting here waiting for Mrs. Marshall. The door opens at last, and she enters. She wears a black gown; the lines in her face are softened; the tones of her voice are different.

"I am almost afraid to come," she says; but I knew that before she spoke. "It must be so painful to you to see me."

"It makes me think, of course, of painful things; but it is a great comfort to see you. I have been longing for you;" and this is

true; I have indeed. Can I ever forget how good she was to Jack, how gentle and how tender? I would give anything to put my arms round her neck and sob my heart out on her shoulder, and to feel that she was not only sorry for me, but loved me just a little bit. But that will never be.

"And you really start to-morrow?"

"Yes; to-morrow morning."

"And you are quite sure that it is wise to go alone, without a nurse or maid of any kind?"

"Oh yes," I answer. "I have always waited on myself, and I should not let any one else wait on Molly. One child and two hands; surely they are enough. They can do everything for her. It would have been different if——"

"I know," she says hastily. "How is Molly?"

"She is just the same."

"She will be better soon. Climate does so much."

"Sometimes I think it will do nothing for

her," I answer doggedly, "and that it is folly to go."

"You must not say that," she answers gently. "Be thankful that you can go. So many see their dear ones die, thinking that some things they could not get would have saved them."

The force of this comes home to me keenly. "I know," I answer quickly, "and am only too thankful that we are able to go; after a little while when I am used to—having Molly alone, I shall be brave again. Overmuch happiness has spoilt me for sorrow, and made me impatient; but I shall be better soon. It is a terrible thing to be born with a great capacity for happiness, and to feel that one has hardly had one's share;" and I try to laugh, and fail.

She is silent for a few minutes, and then she asks, in a sad, broken voice, "Did your husband love you, my dear?"

"Oh yes, yes," I cry, "with all his heart."

"As you did him?"

"As I did him," I answer, trembling with eagerness and passionate remembrance. She sits still, watching me wearily and wonderingly.

"And you had your children when he was here?" she asks, with a long-drawn sigh.

"Yes; there was little Jack. He was such a pretty baby; we have laughed for joy as we watched him——"

"And Molly?"

"And Molly was coming; there was the hope of her, the looking forward. Oh, it was perfect."

She takes my hands, just as she did on that morning a month ago, and looks me sadly in the face, and in her eyes I see a blank hopelessness that drives my own sorrow out of my heart, and leaves it full of compassion for hers.

"Then, be satisfied," she says gently; "you have had your share. If you had only possessed all you have had for a single hour, you would have had your share. Be thankful for that. There are many women with capacity as great as yours for happiness, who are hungry

for it all their lives, and yet are never satisfied for a single hour."

I look at her silently, while the tears slowly gather in her eyes. Now I understand all her coldness and silence, the hard lines, the almost grim voice, and all that had seemed half resentful in her before. I cannot speak, only we look at each other—she who remembers so little, and I who remember so much.

"There are some things worse than death," she says, as the tears roll down her cheeks; and I stoop and kiss her hands and whisper—

"Yes, you are right. Oh, forgive me, and I will cry out no more."

"Ah, my dear, it is hard to keep one's mouth shut when the blow falls; but remember that to bear silently is to show that you think even your bitterest woe not too great a price to pay for your past happiness. You would not have refused to bear the sorest pain for those you——?"

"Oh no, no!" I cry.

"And you are bearing this for them. You

would not have sorrowed so if you had not loved them. Be thankful that you have had your loved ones to bear your sorrow for." And then she gets up and pulls the cloak round her shoulders. "I want to see Molly," she says; and I go and fetch Molly from the little room adjoining, where the housemaid has been reading a fairy story aloud.

"Good-bye, little woman," Mrs. Marshall says, in a voice so kind and gentle that Molly looks up and has confidence, and its sweetness catches my ear, and I long to hear her speak again; and yet her voice is usually so hard. She takes Molly up in her arms, holding her in that longing, half-wondering manner just dashed with fear that is so characteristic of childless women. Then she puts her down, and watches me while I wrap a shawl about my little one, and carry her back to the other room again. She is still standing when I return. She hesitates for a moment, and half doubtfully, half awkwardly, she comes forward and kisses me tenderly on both cheeks,

and looks at my face—a long, grave, sad look, as though she thought she might never see it more; and then she goes. I follow her to the street door, and watch her go down the garden. She turns round at the gate, and says quickly, as if she suddenly remembered something she had forgotten—

"I hope the child will get well. Good-bye." She takes yet another last look at me, and so she vanishes, and I go back to the little empty drawing-room and shut the door.

It seems as if we shall never be ready, as if the night and the things to be done will never come to an end; but at last the morning dawns, and the work is finished, and with one long last look round at the dear little home —the home in which my husband had painted and Jack had played—we depart. The sardine is at the station before us, looking pleased and business-like.

"You are in good time. Quite right, always be in good time for a journey," he says ap-

provingly. "I have got a compartment for you, so you have only to get in, and I'll look after the luggage."

"Why, Mr. Cohen, you did not surely get a whole compartment for us?"—for we are not used to such luxuries.

"Merely a little corruption," he remarks, with extreme satisfaction; and, stopping before a carriage door, he unlocks it with his key and helps us in. "Always corrupt the guard, or the station-master, or some one or other. Do it on principle, you know."

"Oh, but it is wrong, surely——"

"Never mind that. Never over-cultivate your conscience; it's a great mistake, spoils one's enjoyment, and makes everything cut and dried." The sardine always talks as if he had no serious feelings, as if the whole of him was on the surface. He told me once that one of his "ideas" in regard to life was to get as much enjoyment as possible out of everything, and to forget everything in two minutes. He is delighted at having surprised

us by his cleverness. "Wouldn't it have been a bore, now," he asks, "if you had had two fat women, or half a dozen children, all anxious to quarrel with Molly, in the carriage with you?"

"Indeed it would," I answer, amused at the idea of Molly quarrelling with any one. "How do you think Molly looks?" I ask him, for he has hardly spoken to her yet, and she looks sweeter than ever this morning in her little travelling-hood, and with the flush that excitement has brought to her face.

"Oh, she's all right," he says, putting his long fingers under her little soft chin. "She looks ever so much better than you do," he remarks. "You'll have to look out, or you will chump up, and then what would the programme be, I should like to know?"

"It would be very awkward," I answer cheerfully. "I think you would have to adopt Molly."

"That would be a joke," he says thoughtfully.

"You would have to get a step-mother for her," I say, trying to amuse him. "The 'little party,' you know."

He shakes his head gravely. "Oh no; that will never come to anything," he says. "You must get well. You will now; going away will soon set you up, and Molly too. Well, here we are—time to start. Write and tell me how they treat you, and how the young 'un prospers. Good-bye." He shakes my hand, and kisses Molly, and in another minute I am straining my eyes to see the last of him as we whirl away.

When he is out of sight I turn to Molly who is sitting opposite, looking pretty and bright and almost well. As I look at her a wild hope seizes me, and, forgetting everything else, I kneel down and put my arms round her, and kiss her, and hold her close, and hide my face in her lap, while all my strength goes forth in a wild hope and prayer that she may live and be strong.

CHAPTER IX.

We have been three days here at Marseille. There was some mistake about the boats; they only call once a fortnight now, so it will be nearly a week before we start for Malaga. I am glad of it. These days are very quiet and peaceful, a blessed lull in the storm; the beginning, perhaps, of a great calm to come. Molly looks so well that it makes my heart beat quick with hope to look at her. The travelling did not tire her. The journey from Calais to Paris she slept through, and then the strange sights and trees of Paris—for we stayed a night there—delighted her, and made her open her blue eyes wide with wonder, and break out into little ripples of laughter, almost as if she were suddenly quite well again.

"It is so nice, mummy!" she cried, with a long-drawn sigh of content. We strolled on through the streets, watching the light-hearted French people. In the Rue de Rivoli there was a man selling dolls that, when wound up, danced on a little metal table. We stood watching them for a few minutes.

"Would you like one?" I asked Molly.

"Yes, mother," she answered, in a whisper; and so for a franc and a half we bought one, and all the way from Paris to Marseille it was with her. But she tired of that long journey, and once or twice began to cry for Jack.

"Oh, mummy dear, where is Jack? Do tell me where Jack really is. Won't he ever come back?"

And I could only answer, "He was very ill, my darling, and now he is fast asleep. You would not like dear Jack to suffer pain?"

"But I do want him so," she sobbed; "and perhaps he would get well again."

"Won't mother do for you, my sweet? She loves you, and will play with you, and read

stories to you, and do everything in the world for you. Won't poor mother do?" I asked.

"Oh, but you are not little, mother dear, and Jack is, you know; and then Jack sings so beautifully. I do want Jack."

But while she was still sobbing we were getting nearer and nearer to Marseille, and, putting my head out of the window, I caught sight of the gilt statue of Notre Dame de la Garde, which towers above the city. I held Molly up to see it, and she gave a cry of surprise and was satisfied, and did not even see the tears I brushed away, or, if she did, looked on them as belonging to the past—the past of just a few minutes since, as her own had done, and to be forgotten as they were.

It seems so strange to be here alone with Molly. We are never apart for five minutes. The thought of work comes now and then, but since Jack died my hands have lost their sense of power, and feel as if they could only wait on Molly. It satisfies and soothes me, this life lived in her service, and it forces me to be

cheerful, knowing that a hundred times a day her eyes seek my face that she may set her little heart by its expression.

We have spent the days almost entirely out in the sunshine, beneath the southern sky, in sight of the blue waters of the Mediterranean. Many parts of Marseille are dreary enough, but surely the Cannebière is one of the brightest, grandest streets in Europe? Molly is delighted to walk by my side slowly along the wide pavement, beneath the great awnings outside the *cafés*. They are wonderful *cafés;* we are afraid to enter them, but we can see the palms and the looking-glasses and the pictures, as we go slowly past. Outside, on the pavement, are the little round tables, and the happy French folk drinking their coffee, and talking or reading the little newspapers with all their usual eagerness and all the blessed forgetfulness of care that is so characteristic of their nation. We wander on towards the quay, and look at the great ships and tall masts, and I, wondering whence they have come and

whither they are going, tell Molly of strange lands far away; and she, understanding better since she left her home that the world stretches far beyond it, listens as if she were listening to some new fairy tale. We stop as we come back, and turn down the Rue de Grignan, and, coming to the post-office, ask if there are any letters. To my surprise, there is one from the sardine. He has found out about the alteration in the boats, and says how sorry he is at the delay; but I am not. We shall not be happier at Malaga than we are here. We walk on till we come to the Cannebière again, and linger by the shops that have placed their wares on wide stalls outside their windows, and Molly talks of spending her little store of money; but when we get nearer to them the things that have looked so bright in the distance are all commonplace and useless, and most of them are English, and even Molly is not tempted. She likes the flower-market better than anything else in Marseille. We go there every morning. The first time she saw

the women in the raised wooden stalls so like pulpits, with the great bouquets on the counter, and the baskets brimming over with flowers at their feet, she laughed aloud for joy.

Yesterday we saw an Arab sitting on the ground, selling black beads made of rose-leaves, and baskets of coloured cloth, and charms of shells, and all manner of little odds and ends. We had neither of us ever seen an Arab before, and we stood together looking at him like a couple of foolish children. To Molly he was merely a strange being, with a brown face and a red fez and funny clothes; but to me he was a whole past suddenly risen up before me, and swiftly I thought of the people he had descended from, of their teaching and their learning, of the universities they had founded and the palaces they had built, of all their glories and triumphs, and of the beggars and the ruins that remained. All in a moment they seemed mixed up before my eyes in the odd, incoherent manner that all things pass before me now, for nothing is clear or consecutive. The Arab

tried to tempt us with his wares, and I bought one of the rose-leaf necklaces for Molly. They say there is a charm in them, but it looked so black about her neck that it made me shudder.

We spend hours on the Prado, looking up at the trees and the little bits of blue sky we can see between the green leaves, or listening to the trickling of the fountains, and watching the busy groups and the carriages and the tram-cars going past in the Cannebière beyond. We sat on one of the seats for a long time yesterday, after our bargaining with the Arab, and amused ourselves by watching the dancing sunshine that came through the leaves. And Molly looked so well and happy that even with the past fresh and sore upon me, I felt that if only the world might stand still at that one moment I could for ever be content. Did not Keats envy the shepherd and the shepherdess on the urn, and the happy chase through all the ages? If only the world would stand still as it had for those two lovers, how good it would be. But that would not be life, for

crystallization is death; and yet for death so sweet would not life be a trifling price to pay? Sometimes it is not warm enough to sit long on the Prado, and then we walk slowly up and down; and if Molly looks tired or cold, I take her up in my arms and carry her. Her weight makes me stagger now and then, but it is only because I am so broken down, for she is very light, and it is a blessed thing to carry her in my arms again, as I used in the little garden at home when she was still a baby; it makes me fancy that she is a baby still. And it makes me think of Jack, the first little one of all, whose coming made our hearts sing for joy in the happy days gone by.

This is a wonderful city. Every day it grows more impressive; for, as it knows one better, it seems to take one into its confidence, and to tell one how full it is of memories. I am never tired of watching the water, and thinking of the ships that sailed upon it hundreds of years ago, or of wondering what it all looked like when the Greeks came and

built their city. It seems to be like a dream now, just as these days are like a dream. Oh that the waking might never come.

How odd are some things of which we can give no rational account. Last night, while Molly was in bed, I sat by her, as I always do—half through the night sometimes, for it seems a pity to waste too much of this most precious time in sleep. And as I watched her, in her little white gown, with her head upon the pillow, she looked like some pure spirit come into the world to bless it. "She will not surely go?" I thought; and then something—ah, what was it?—seemed to say to me half pityingly, "Can you not submit? There may be a worse fate still than seeing your little one die; a day may come, perhaps, when you will wonder that you cried out at Death, that only lingered near in mercy, and to save you." To save me? "There are some things worse than death," Mrs. Marshall said. Oh, but it is all nonsense and madness and folly. What can anything matter more if

Molly does but live? If Molly lives and gets strong, then Fate is powerless, and all the world may try its worst, for all other blows have fallen. Pain and poverty or anything in the world may come if this one little life remains. Sometimes at night, when I hear her short, quick breathing, I stand still and tremble and clasp my hands in fear; but then she turns in her sleep, and is easier, and a new spell of hope comes again; and so the days go by.

We went an excursion to-day, in one of the tramcars with the seats that reverse. It seemed a pity to spend money on a carriage, and the people in the tramcars looked so happy that we longed to be among them. It is terrible how one hungers for happiness when one is still young; it is only the old that can be content with sorrow, and make it their accepted lot. We looked at each other with satisfaction as we took our seats. We both felt the same, I think—like two children overdone by fate, and longing to be happy. We

went far out to a suburb, but its name I have already forgotten. When the car stopped and went no farther, we got down and walked about, and found some trees that looked like sturdy green carubas, the evergreen of John the Baptist, and, in the half-dazed fashion I have got into, they set me dreaming again. And then we came to a long white sunny road, with seats here and there, and a high stone wall on one side, and the blue sea on the other. Over the wall some bright flowers hung in masses. I picked a bunch and made a wreath and put it round Molly's straw hat, and she looked so lovely that it made me laugh right out. Laugh out! though it is not six weeks since I laid my boy to rest, and the sun that shines on us is shining on the grass above him. My heart quaked at the sound of my own merriment; and yet—and yet, Molly dear, get well, and I will laugh for you, my sweet.

As we got up from the seat, Molly gave a cry of wonder and surprise, for a long green

lizard darted past, and she had never seen one before. We stood still, hand-in-hand, and watched it for a moment as it disappeared among the stones. Then we crossed the road and went over to the sea, and walked a little way, but she looked so tired that I carried her, and so we went on till we came to a *café*. It was a little countrified place, with a table outside and two chairs slanting into the sandy ground, and a red curtain hung across the doorway to keep the inside cool. We entered and rested. It was half a restaurant too, for they had bread and wine, and very hard cheese and fruit. I had some coffee, and Molly ate some small black grapes, while the old Frenchwoman looked at her, and told me she was beautiful; and when I smiled and seemed pleased she added that she did not look like a strong child, as if she thought it well to show that she had discriminating eyes, and wished to qualify the pleasure she had given. But she was a kind old woman, and when we left she came out of the door and stood

watching us on our way, as though she thought it a good thing to keep so sweet a little child in sight as long as possible. The tramcar seemed as if it would never come, so when a chance fly overtook us we stopped it, for Molly was very tired; but she brightened up as we got in. It was an open fly, and the cushions were covered with red and white striped holland.

"Such a pretty carriage," she said, and sat up proudly on the seat beside me. The soft wind blew back her hair, and I felt proud to think that she was my own little daughter, and wondered what she would look like some day when she had grown to be a woman. She crept a little closer to me, and whispered, "Mother dear, what are you thinking about?" and for answer I put my arms around her and drew her closer, and so we drove to the city of Marseille, and to the hotel.

This morning the ship has come, and we are to sail at four o'clock. We take our last walk

down the Cannebière, a last walk among the flowers. We pass the Arab with the beads; there are two or three of his countrymen about to-day. We walk once more along the Prado, looking up at the trees, and sit down on the seat for a few minutes, so that the sunshine coming through the leaves above may fleck us with its gold once more. A few hours later we are driving to the quay, and say good-bye to Marseille, while the statue of Notre Dame de la Garde seems to be watching us on our way to Malaga.

CHAPTER X.

BEFORE we have been long on board we make acquaintance with one of the passengers. She sits down, and in the course of an hour, in a dull, mechanical sort of way, tells us all about herself. She is a young woman, pale and quiet. She has the air of a nursery governess, and something in her manner suggests that she is an orphan. She is companion to a Mrs. Greenside, who is not very well and in her cabin.

"Mrs. Greenside is always getting ill," Miss Martin says softly; "that is why she goes about so much."

"And does it do her good?" I ask.

"No; I don't think so. She never says that she is better," Miss Martin answers.

"Perhaps she likes travelling," I say, just for the sake of saying something, and not because I feel particularly interested in Miss Martin or in Mrs. Greenside.

"Yes, perhaps she does," Miss Martin says, and the utter want of interest in her manner and the dull tones of her voice make one sorry for her.

"And you—do you like travelling?" I ask her.

"Oh yes, sometimes; only I always get tired of the places, and it is tiresome to be always packing."

She is not a companion of the lady description, but of the respectable young person type. She does not say "ma'am," but for all that she brushes Mrs. Greenside's hair, and does the packing, and probably gets scolded if anything is left behind.

"Are you not looking forward to seeing your home?" I ask; for she looks at me in the pauses, as if meekly waiting to be questioned. She told me a few minutes since that

she and Mrs. Greenside had been abroad for some months.

"No," she answers; "I don't think about it much."

"I thought, perhaps, you had friends or relations, and were longing to see them. People get so anxious about relations when they are far away."

"Oh yes; I have relations, of course," she says. "I suppose I shall be glad to see them when the time comes; but it is no good looking forward or thinking of meeting them beforehand. They may be ill, or a dozen things. Are you going all the way to Bordeaux by this ship?"

The question is evidently only put to make conversation of some sort. She is no more curious concerning us than interested in herself.

"No; only to Malaga, to winter there. My child is ill," I add, looking towards Molly, who is anxiously watching the man at the wheel.

"I see," she answers placidly, as if she

thinks a child's illness as good a reason as any other for coming abroad. "That gentleman is going to Malaga," she says, indicating a tall man a little way off; "I saw it on his luggage. His name is George Murray."

"Murray? Why, that is the name of the doctor to whom I have an introduction; but it can't be the same, for his name is John Taylor Murray." I look at him curiously as he slowly passes us. "He has a good face," I remark.

"Has he?" she answers. "I have not looked at him; people are so much alike abroad. I never look at them now; but I always notice the names on their luggage. I knew yours was Mrs. Keith before you came on board. I saw your trunks coming up the gangway."

Molly runs up to us, her eyes bright with pleasure, her cheeks tinged with a colour that looks like health.

"I do so like being in a ship!" she exclaims. "It is so funny to think that, even if it stops,

there is nothing but water to get out on. It would not do to get off the ship, would it, mother?"

"No, my child; it wouldn't," I laugh, and look up at Miss Martin; but she seems a little bored, and looks over the side of the ship at the waves for a moment or two, and then absently moves away.

When the dinner-bell rings, I find that my place at table is next to Mr. Murray, so conclude that, like myself, he is a recent comer. We soon begin to talk, for on board ship it is an easy matter to get on friendly terms in even a few minutes; but there is no time to ask him whether he is related to the doctor at Malaga, for I have to hurry away from the table, because it is the hour at which Molly goes to bed. When she is sleeping, I creep upstairs in the twilight, and stand watching the water and the long track the ship leaves on the waves behind us. It is a little cold, and I pull my shawl tighter round me and sit down and think. But I cannot bear it long; the sea

is too full of memories and all the shadows of meaning, and the darkness and the silence frighten me. Oh, the silence! how terrible it is. There is no eloquence in this living world so terrible as silence; but it is the eloquence of the dead. I cannot bear it longer, and turn and go to the cabin where Molly is, and sleep on the sofa beneath the window, opposite her berth, so that when day breaks I may open my eyes to look upon her face. And so the night passes.

Molly awakes early, and cries, "mother!" It is like the voice of a bird calling from a branch. I open my tired eyes, and blow kisses to her, and call her my pretty one and my dickie-bird; and she laughs and talks, and looks like a fresh-blown rose, as if in the night all sickness and weakness had fled away.

"We will go on deck and see the waves," I say, and begin to dress her.

Sometimes I feel sorry for men. More greatness is theirs in life, but more sweetness is ours—the sweetness that is gained from little

things, especially from the daily service given to those we love. I think this as I put on Molly's clothes, while even my finger-tips are sensible of the happiness there is in touching each thing that is hers.

It is a bright, happy morning, and every wave and ripple rejoices in it. Molly looks round, and gives a little shout for joy as we go on deck, and holds my hand a little tighter just because she feels how lovely it all is, and has no other way of expressing herself. Perhaps they expressed themselves so in the beginning of the world, when beauty and happiness were born, but words were not. They did well enough without them, and again I think how eloquent is silence. There is a blissful silence for the living as well as a terrible one for the dead. But I will forget everything concerning death and sorrow on this sweet morning. The sea does not appal me as it did last night, and the memories it brings are less vivid than they have ever been before. For Molly is looking well, and she and

I are together here in the sunshine, and there is the aching and longing for happiness in my heart, and a half-promise seems in the air—a promise that perhaps, softly and unexpectedly, happiness may come stealing back.

"And now," Molly says, when we are tired of walking about, and have sat down in some still sleeping passenger's chair, for it wants nearly an hour to breakfast, and no one is on deck but ourselves—"and now tell me a story."

I protest that I don't know one, but she declares I do, and at last I give way, and ask what it shall be, for I seldom tell her new stories, but the old ones over and over again. She seems to think that it is slighting her old friends to like the new ones too well.

"Tell me the story of the white rabbit," she says.

So I begin the story of the white rabbit. "'*Once upon a time there was a white rabbit, and he lived down a hole in the woods at the foot of the snow mountains,*'" and I go patiently

on, until at last, with a sad shake of his little white tail, he disappears in the snow palace, and is seen no more.

"It is such a pretty story," she says, with a long sigh of satisfaction; and then we laugh, for we both—she as well as I—know how ridiculous it is.

Suddenly we look up and see Mr. Murray. He is watching Molly, as only a man really fond of children watches a child. We soon get into conversation, while Molly goes to inspect the wheel-house again, and I discover that he is brother to the Malaga doctor.

"I am to take his patients while he goes to England for the winter," he says, "for I am also a doctor."

"Then you will look after Molly?" I answer, feeling a sudden interest in him.

"Yes, certainly I will, if you wish it. There is another English doctor at Malaga now, so that my brother is no longer the only one." There is something honest in this communication. He looks at Molly,

and adds, "The climate will do everything for her."

"Dr. Finch was not very hopeful," I say sadly; and tell him what the great doctor has said about her.

"I have seen some strange recoveries," he answers. "A child has the most wonderful faculty for outgrowing things, and there is simply no knowing what climate will not do. We have never till lately taken it sufficiently into account. You must make up your mind that she is going to live. A child will outgrow anything, remember." And so, when the breakfast-bell rings, it finds me with a happier face and a lighter heart than I have worn this long time.

Before the day is out I know all about our doctor. He has been in Ceylon, looking after a coffee estate that had belonged to his mother, and at the same time investigating the disease in the coffee plant; but he has done some practising as well. He took an excellent degree at Cambridge, and was at one of the

London hospitals before going abroad. Now he is on his way to take his brother's practice for the winter, and later on he means to devote himself to the scientific study of medicine. He is very clever, I hear, a little eccentric, very kind-hearted, and fond of children. To look at, he is fair, with soft, kind grey eyes. He is well but slightly built, and perhaps two or three and thirty years of age. There is something about him that it is impossible to help liking, a manliness and frankness, a certain simple confidence in other people and in the best side of all things that wins one, and makes one feel that he is, above all things, a man to trust and believe in.

How quickly these days have passed. In half an hour we shall be at Malaga, or rather we shall have landed, for we have already dropped anchor, and as soon as the usual formalities are over we shall be allowed to go on shore. All the passengers are on deck, and we who are soon to leave the ship, stand

looking anxiously at the Spanish land. Malaga itself looks ugly enough, though its setting is splendid. The houses are white, and the windows many—square black windows, like blank, staring eyes with no white lids to soften them, staring for ever out at the sea. There are tall smoky chimneys, and the port is dirty and ugly; but for all this there is compensation in the sun, which is shining over everything. Beyond the city the Sierra de Antequera rises far up into the sky; and on the other side is a great mountain gorge. Along the shore we can see the sugar-canes, and stretching far back are palms and what we take to be prickly pears and all the strange vegetation that belongs to the southern land. The water beneath us is still and blue, the air is warm and soft; we hear the dip of the boatmen's oars as they crowd round the ship, and the not very eager voices of the boatmen, offering to take passengers on shore. The stillness around is intense stillness, and every sound that breaks it, whether it be a sailor's voice or

the dip of an oar, is clear and distinct. Now and then we see movements on shore, but there are few people about; the whole place seems to be drowsy and sleepy from overmuch sunshine.

Suddenly Miss Martin comes up to me. Mrs. Greenside is not very well. She is afraid to go on, and thinks of landing here. Would I mind coming and speaking to her for a moment? So I leave Molly sitting on a pile of wraps on the top of one of the boxes, and go to the deck-chair a little way back.

Mrs. Greenside is eight-and-forty perhaps, and overmuch wrinkled for her age. She has very white hands with many rings on them; among them is a lozenge-shaped diamond one. I see it flashing as I go up to her, and wonder if she bought it, or if in bygone years some one loved her very much and gave her all her rings —some one who now is gone. She is not an interesting woman, and one does not care much about her; but, poor thing, this does not make her pains less keen, or her anxieties less real,

and I go towards her feeling this, and wishing she did not bore me. There is something about her that is rather overpowering; she takes possession of you, she appeals too obviously to your sympathies, so that, though she is ill and alone, you half grudge them. She gives you the impression that she is capable of shams of many nervous kinds, and yet that she is one of those women who, when they are roused, will take any trouble, push themselves anywhere, do anything, give anything, to attain an object not merely for themselves, but for any one who will come before them at the right moment. I am very uncharitable to her.

"Mrs. Keith," she says, and her voice is that of one who has really suffered, and makes me sorry for her in a moment, "I want to ask your advice. You are so clever, and you must have so much courage to travel all alone with your delicate little child, I am sure you will advise me." She always asks advice about things in the most earnest manner, but she never takes it. She always seems to have

made up her mind from the beginning what she is going to do, but you only find this out after she has listened to all you have to say. "Don't you think I had better stay at Malaga? these short stoppages and voyages upset me terribly. The voyage from Marseille has tired me so."

"And you don't feel well?" I ask, wondering why she consults me.

"No, indeed," and she sighs. "I am never well, am I, Miss Martin?"

She looks up at her companion. Miss Martin is listlessly watching the boatmen rowing round the ship; but she turns and answers like a machine, "No; Mrs. Greenside is never well," and watches the boatmen again.

"Do you like the doctor?" she asks anxiously. "I understand he is going to take his brother's practice at Malaga."

"Yes, certainly I like him; but I have only known him since we came on board."

"Oh, but you have evidently so much discernment of character."

This is the sort of thing she always says; she seems to believe in the wisdom of every one about her; but it is absurd to believe in mine, for she must know much better than I do about most things. Perhaps it comforts her, poor soul, to lean even on the weakest props, for it must be miserable to be alone seeking health, and to have none she loves beside her.

"How far were you going by this ship?" I ask.

"To Gibraltar. I expect to meet my brother there, and his dear motherless girl. She is just like my own child. I never had any children of my own," she adds, shaking her head sadly; and my heart aches for her. "I never had any children," she repeats; "perhaps it is as well, with my wretched health; and this dear girl is just like my own."

"But if you stop here, will you not miss seeing your brother and niece?" I ask. "Are they at Gibraltar now?"

"I am not sure whether they have arrived

yet," she answers. "They have been yachting in the Mediterranean, and expected to put into Gibraltar about the middle of the month, and I promised to wait for them there. My poor brother is still grieving over his wife's death, and there is no one but me now to take care of his motherless girl."

"But will you not miss them by going to Malaga?" I ask.

"Oh, if I telegraph, telling them the state I am in, they will instantly come to me," she answers, with a little smile, which seems to say that their devotion to her is unbounded. "I can't go back to England this winter; it would kill me to face the cold and fog. You know that, don't you, Miss Martin?"

"Yes, I know that, Mrs. Greenside," Miss Martin says, turning from the boats again for a minute.

"I should only stay a few weeks at most at Malaga, but it would be a break in my long exile"—she says the word exile as if it meant Siberia—"and the doctor seems to be a clever

man, he might do me a world of good ; it is so very difficult to come across a good doctor abroad."

"I dare say you will find it very pleasant at Malaga, Mrs. Greenside," I say, "and I hope it will do you good. Perhaps Miss Martin will like seeing Spain too ?" I add, looking up at her.

"Oh !" Mrs. Greenside exclaims softly, with a little expression round her mouth that says it really does not matter in the least what Miss Martin likes.

"It is always interesting to see places," the companion answers, "only they are so much alike."

"I think we will arrange to land," Mrs. Greenside says nervously. "Thank you so much for your help, Mrs. Keith. Do tell me where you are going to stop ; it would be such a comfort to go to the same place."

I tell her the name of the hotel picked haphazard out of Bradshaw, and then she appears to be satisfied, and proceeds to make arrangements for going on shore.

Presently, when I am in the saloon getting Molly a glass of water, I run against Miss Martin, with her arms full of wraps and a dressing-bag and half a dozen other things.

"Let me help you carry these up," I say; and suddenly something makes me ask, "Miss Martin, is Mrs. Greenside a Jewess?"

"I don't know; she was once. She is not strong enough to trouble about it now; perhaps she is something else. I never thought about it," the companion answers in her usual voice with her usual expression of face, or I might think that she was joking.

Now I understand what had puzzled me about Mrs. Greenside. I have been wondering if I had met her before. Her face, the pale faded face, that is not thin, yet full of lines and traces of sickness; the large dull eyes; the dark hair pushed back; the diamond rings;—all had seemed familiar to me, but it was not the individual, but the type that I had recognized.

Mrs. Greenside is quite overcome when she

sees that I have helped to bring up her belongings.

"Oh, Mrs. Keith!" she exclaims, "you are too kind. You should have let Miss Martin do this; she is quite used to it. What a sweet child your little girl is; I have been watching her most intently. She is the image of you, Mrs. Keith." She looks at me and gives a long sigh, and adds, slowly, "she is most beautiful." And then she opens a bag and gives Molly some chocolate, and watches her eat with a solemn interest that is almost touching. She is evidently a very kind woman; I am glad we are going to the same hotel.

CHAPTER XI.

It is very exciting to look at Malaga. I stand and drink it in with my eyes. What does it matter if the houses are ugly and gaunt? There behind are the great mountains, and the bright green vegetation glowing in the light, and above is the blue sky, and all about is the sunshine—the blessed sunshine that is to make my little child well. I turn and look at her, and as our eyes meet we laugh like two children glad to be together, and full of thankfulness that we are here.

A quarter of an hour later, while Miss Martin is still getting Mrs. Greenside's many packages together, Molly and I go down the gangway steps and row to the Spanish shore. I wonder if I shall ever forget the noise and fuss and

discomfort of this landing? And yet I do not mind any of it; it amuses me, and the strangeness and newness of everything fascinate me just as they do Molly, who clings to me, and looks up at me with grave eyes wide open and bewildered, not knowing whether to laugh or to be afraid. There is no custom-house. Our luggage is examined there in the street, while we look on, and the dirty black-eyed beggar boys lean over the rail put to prevent them from crowding round too closely. At last we manage to get into a jolting fly, and the porters and boatmen lift up our luggage, and with much earnestness cheat us right and left before they let us drive off to the hotel.

Mr. Murray was to have been with us, and promised to help us land, but a fireman on board the ship injured his hand, and he stayed behind to see what could be done. But we are all safe now, I think, as we drive away, and look curiously around to see what this new land to which we have come is like. It is not as yet inviting. The streets are dirty, the

houses low; we pass no handsome buildings, no gay *cafés* as at Marseille; there are no trees till we get to the Alameda, and there they look dusty and miserable, and the ground beneath them is dirty and ill-kept. Altogether, it looks as cheerless a place for wintering in as can well be imagined. There is a cold, north-easterly wind blowing, too; at sea we did not feel it, but here it meets us as we turn the corners of the narrow, unsavoury streets. My heart misgives me, but still I will not be dismayed. Is there not a blue sky overhead, and surely that will see my little Molly get well, and what else matters? Suddenly the excitement fails, a mist gathers about all things, and I remember that I have been suffering pain these hours past, though I have hardly noticed it.

"Mother dear," Molly whispers, as we stop at the hotel, "your face is so white. Are you ill, darling?" and she pushes her hand into mine.

I look round and see some dirty boys

watching us. There is a beggar who holds up a diseased arm; there is a man leaning against the doorpost. I can see a little way into the hall of the hotel—it is ugly and dirty; and then all things swim softly away, and I can see the blue water and the ship, and it is all so beautiful, only I am choking; and where is Molly? Is Molly gone?

We are sitting in a little room, evidently just inside the hotel. It looks like the porter's room. There is a half-bottle of wine on the table, and a half-finished plateful of untempting-looking food. Outside the door is our luggage. Some ragged children peep in from the street; I can see the people passing to and fro. Molly has been crying, and clings to me in fear; she kisses me as I look wonderingly around, and try to remember what it all means. There is a dark man standing by me, with a look of patient waiting on his face, as if he had been politely wasting his time till it should please me to come to my senses again.

"Is anything the matter?" I ask.

The dark man bows and goes leisurely to the door, and, looking up and down the hall, makes a strange sound which my little knowledge of Spanish will not permit me to understand. It results in the coming of a fair man with a red moustache, and a heavy watch-chain so evidently false that it catches my eye the moment he appears. He is English, and the interpreter to the hotel.

"Is anything the matter?" I repeat.

"You were faint, madam," he answers, with a bow and smile, as though he were making some pleasant little remark. "The fatigue of the journey, perhaps. You are better, and would like to see your rooms, madam? We have sent for the English doctor, but he is not yet here. You would like to see him in your room?"

Molly clings to me and caresses my hand as we go up the bare, unswept stairs. Was ever place so unwelcoming in the civilized world as this Spanish one? Slowly following

the Englishman and the Spaniard, who seems to be the landlord, we pass the *salle-à-manger* on the first floor; it looks dark and haunted by flies. On the whitewashed walls we can see what appears to be the advertisement of a bull-fight. We go up another flight of stairs, and stop before a door. We wait till the landlord succeeds in unlocking it, and opens one half of it, and then we enter, Molly and I, and look round. It is a large room, with a dusty red tile floor. It contains two beds in an alcove, and a table is in the middle of the room; against the wall there is a large worm-eaten sofa covered with faded green velvet. Everything is worn out and tawdry and uncomfortable. We go to the windows and look out. There is the Alameda stretching along the middle of the wide space between us and the opposite houses. On either side the Alameda are the broken-down carriages, the beggars, and the people who are not beggars and yet do not look one whit more cheerful than their less prosperous fellows. I think of

the French people, and the Italians and the Swiss, and wonder why these Spaniards look so different. There is a row of houses on the other side of the Alameda, but it is not picturesque; nothing is. As yet everything is ugly and disappointing, and I begin to think with dismay that this is not the place in which Molly will get well.

The landlord disappears, and I sit down on the faded sofa, and, taking Molly on my lap, try hard to keep back the tears that weakness and disappointment are forcing into my eyes. But this is foolish. We came for the sky, not for the houses or the furniture. Why should I lose heart because the streets are dusty and the rooms are ugly?

"Dear little Molly," I say, "we will be very happy here;" but do not quite believe myself.

In half an hour Dr. Murray comes, and as I look at him I feel thankful that we are not to be in his hands for the winter. He is older by ten years than the brother who has just

arrived. He is tall and grave, with cold grey eyes and a well-shaved chin. He has a way of looking at you as though he could see you through and through, and he makes you feel, while you are speaking to him, as if you were not altogether accurate, and that knowing this he coldly made allowance for it. For all this, there is something in his manner that impresses you with his skill; you dislike him, but you feel an unwilling confidence in his power. He asks what is the matter, and looks at me curiously and silently while I hurriedly tell him that nothing is the matter except that I have been tired, and have fainted from fatigue, I suppose, and anxiety about my child. I was always impatient of doctoring for myself, and never could take the trouble to carry out directions, but when I have been ill have always got well as best I could, and from mere strength of my own will.

Dr. Murray is apparently satisfied with my account, though I feel that he does not altogether believe it; he prescribes a tonic, and

then he looks at Molly. He reads the letter I have brought from Dr. Finch, and says he will come with his brother to examine her to-morrow. It will be better that they should do so together, as she is to be his brother's patient. He says, in a cold, confident voice, that a child's life is a thing never to be despaired of—which, while it shows that he recognizes the gravity of Dr. Finch's report, gives me hope and courage. And then he remarks that we have come to the wrong hotel —that this is not the best place, though it is kept by respectable people; and I tell him how disappointing Malaga is as far as I have seen it, that it looks like the dreariest, ugliest place in the world for sick folk to get well in, and that I had hoped we should be in the country.

"Perhaps you would like Zahra better," he says politely. "It is a little place four or five miles from Malaga, along the shore. There is an inn there, quite Spanish, but comfortable and clean. A good many Spaniards

stay there in the summer for the bathing, and English people have had a fancy for it last year and this. It is warm and sheltered, and there are some pretty walks, which there are not around Malaga."

"Why do people come to Malaga?" I ask.

"Simply for the climate," he answers. "There is nothing else."

"But we should be so far from a doctor if we went to this other place."

"No, for my house is at Zahra," he answers, "and my brother will live in it this winter. I merely come into Malaga every day, and at night if I am wanted they have to send a man on horseback after me."

"And it is pretty?"

"It is interesting, as all places are where the Moors have been. I don't know, of course, if the Moorish traditions interest you; they do most people. Unfortunately, they have left few traces of any kind at Zahra. An old Welshman, Udal ap Rhys, who described it in

some travels he wrote a great many years ago, said it was a cultivated garden full of flowers and fruit, with a climate that was truly blessed, but this is no longer true of it, except in regard to the climate."

"Why is this?"

He shrugs his shoulders, and looks as if he did not wish to be led into a discussion. "The last thing a Spaniard does is to take care of the land," he answers. "But, as I say, it has a fine climate, and it is free from the dust and smells of Malaga. I will leave you to think it over, Mrs. Keith;" and he looks as if he wished to go.

"There are some English at the inn at Zahra?" I ask, anxious to be satisfied on that point.

"Fonda de Madrid it is called. Several English people are there: Lord and Lady Bexley, and some very nice people called Vincent." Vincent? They are Alice Grey's friends.

"Is a Mr. Ralph Bicknell staying there?" I ask quickly, suddenly remembering my old

playfellow, and thinking it would be pleasant to see him again.

Dr. Murray looks at me coldly for a moment, as if he disapproved of the question, though I do not know why he should. It makes the colour come to my face, not on Ralph Bicknell's account, but because of Dr. Murray's seeming disapproval.

"He may be," he answers, "but I don't know him by name. Several people have been there this winter. But you had better rest here for a few days, Mrs. Keith," he says, in a distant, professional tone. "To-morrow my brother and I will come and see your child."

After he has gone, Miss Martin comes to the door to ask after Molly, and if she may help me to unpack. I refuse the offered kindness, but am grateful enough to her; and then Molly, standing by the window, cries out for joy at sight of a water-carrier, and the next moment something else takes her fancy, and she exclaims, "Oh, mother, the ladies in the street

have no bonnets on—only lace things, and they are so pretty."

What a world of trifles it is. Passing a looking-glass, I lift Molly up in my arms and stand before it. We both look better, and suddenly I laugh out just as I did at Marseille, for the new hope is strong again, and she looks as if she would get well. And then all the world will grow bright again, and we shall be happy once more. It is not coldness, it is not forgetfulness, but I am so sated with sorrow; I am young and full of life, and my heart hungers and cries out for happiness, and longs for it as a starving soul for food. Get well, little Molly; get well, my sweet, and we will be happy together.

Molly is going to dine at the *table d'hôte* with the rest on this first evening. As we enter the dining-room the dark-haired Spaniards turn and look at her, and my knowledge of Spanish is enough to let me understand when one of them says that she is beautiful, and that her hair is like the sunshine. The other Spaniard

says it is like her mother's hair, and I am as pleased to be admired once more as if all the world were before me still, and sorrow and I were strangers.

CHAPTER XII.

We are all at Zahra, Mrs. Greenside and Miss Martin, Molly and I.

"Let us go at once, my dear Mrs. Keith," Mrs. Greenside said, directly she was told of the place. It was odd how she fastened herself on to us at Malaga, as if she almost felt us to be some help and protection. She is a nervous, clinging woman, and evidently must lean on some one; it makes me think how terrible her widowhood must be to her. Yet it is strange that she, so many years older and so much richer than I, and not alone here as I am, for Miss Martin is with her, should find it any comfort to lean on a broken reed like myself. Poor thing! But I am glad to be of any comfort, even though it is ever so little, to some one in the world.

"Would it not be very dull for you at this little place?" I asked; "and what would you do about your brother?"

"He would come to me at Zahra," she answered, with her little confident smile, while her diamond rings flashed in the sunshine. "He would come to me anywhere."

"And your niece—would it not be dull for her? The doctor said it was a very quiet place."

"But he said there were some English at the hotel. They are sure to be pleasant people."

It was evident that the people at the hotel had a great deal to do with Mrs. Greenside's longing to go to Zahra. I confess that they had with mine also, chiefly because I was anxious to see my old playfellow again, and he was perhaps with the Vincents, I thought; even if he was not, it would be interesting to see the girl he was possibly in love with, for I remembered what Alice Grey had said about Miss Vincent. I told Mrs. Greenside that some

friends of my cousin's were at Zahra, and that the doctor had mentioned that Lord and Lady Bexley were there also, and then she became still more eager to leave Malaga without delay.

"It will be such a good thing for you to be in the same house with some friends, Mrs. Keith," she said, in her slow, eager voice, though I felt that it was not for me, but rather for herself, that she was urging it. "Lord and Lady Bexley will be interesting people to meet. He wrote a most delightful book of travels in Italy; I remember seeing it at the hotel at Genoa last year. Let us go at once, Mrs. Keith," she repeated. "It will be much better than this place for your sweet little child."

"I must wait until Dr. Murray and his brother have seen her," I said. "But don't let us keep you, Mrs. Greenside; we will come on to-morrow or the next day," I added, thinking that there was no reason why she should wait for me.

"Oh no; I am too tired," she answered. "I

ought to rest to-day; besides, I am so anxious to hear what they say about your little girl."

Presently, almost against my will, and in spite of myself, I found that we were driving round Malaga, "just to see what it was like," she said. Somehow, she impressed me with the idea, as we drove along, that she was merely looking at the place with the eye of a person who would at some future time desire to talk about it if the opportunity offered, but from no other point of view, and with no other desire. That drive confirmed all that we had both previously thought of Malaga. The streets were as ugly as they had looked the day before; the only drive the man seemed to know was along the dried-up bed of a river. We jolted on in the sand, and over the stones at the foot of barren ranges, past prickly pears and straggling, neglected sugar-canes, in sight of grand outlines of forlorn-looking brown mountains, until our hearts grew heavy and our spirits sank.

"Oh, let us go back," Mrs. Greenside said,

and there was a sudden air of authority about her, in spite of her clinging manner; "we will go back at once, Mrs. Keith."

Without waiting for an answer, she told the driver to turn back. She insisted on paying for the carriage; I did not know why, but she did it as a matter of course, and when I offered her my share she pushed me away almost rudely. Taking no notice of the driver's attempts at extortion, she walked into the hotel with a languid air of suffering and determination, mingled with a visible satisfaction at not having been cheated as much as might have been expected, that was both curious and amusing.

"Take my things upstairs, Miss Martin," she said, and went slowly up to her room, while the companion followed.

Molly and I followed too, and as we stopped at our own door Mrs. Greenside turned.

"Now, do go and get some rest, dear Mrs. Keith," she said. "I am sure you want it after that terrible drive, and let me know what

the doctors say to your child. I shall be so anxious to hear. To-morrow we will go to Zahra; I dare say Dr. Murray would secure rooms for us."

When we had meekly entered and shut the door, but not till then, she turned away from us.

While Molly rested on the green sofa, and I was impatiently waiting for the doctor and his brother, I wrote to the sardine, giving him various details of our journey, and to amuse him, described Mrs. Greenside and told him how I had found out that she was a Jewess, but thought she was ashamed of it, for I knew that would make him laugh; and then I put aside my letter, in order to add a postscript after the doctor and his brother had been.

They came quite punctually. They examined Molly carefully, and consulted together, and then they came back to me, after I had carried Molly into Mrs. Greenside's room, so as to be alone to hear their verdict.

"Well?" I asked anxiously.

"Well," Dr. George, as I call him, to distinguish him from his brother, said, "you must cheer up, Mrs. Keith. The child is very delicate, but we cannot see why, with care and in time, she should not grow strong."

They seemed such blessed words. I looked round, at the two little beds in the alcove, at the faded sofa, at the tops of the dusty trees that I could see out of the window, and wondered why the whole world had altered so suddenly, for nothing looked ugly or dreary now.

"You think she won't die?" I gasped. "You think she may really live?"

They seemed half to repent their good words.

"We can't be certain, Mrs. Keith," Dr. George said gently. "We only say that she may outgrow her weakness;" and then he added, "We are anxious about you; we think you look so delicate. Have you any friends likely to come out to you here?"

"No, none," I answered; "but that doesn't matter. I shall get quite well if Molly does. I have only been over-worried."

Dr. Murray was looking at me critically. "I think she would be better at Zahra," he said to his brother.

"We are going there if we may and can get rooms," I tell them.

"I will go and look after them. At Zahra you will be near me, and I can take care of you," Dr. George said, with a helpful look in his kind eyes. "There are plenty of books in my brother's house, and Molly can come and gather oranges in the garden."

Thus it was that we came to Zahra. We all came together—Mrs. Greenside, Miss Martin, Molly, and I. We were quite right to come, we saw that directly; it is a great improvement on Malaga. It is a very little place, just as the doctor said, but it is making a little struggle of its own to get into fashion. The Spaniards like it, and come in the summer to bathe—not many, but quite enough to suggest a future to any one with ambition or energy, though in this country it is doubtful if such a one is to be found anywhere. There is a

beach, and a shady promenade above it; a wide street, a few narrow ones, two or three smart *cafés*, and an inn. The last is in the wide street, opposite the chief *café*; it is not large, but clean and simple, and comfortable in spite of its bareness. There are three floors of rooms built after the Moorish plan round a patio, or covered courtyard. There are great palms growing in the patio; and beneath them, in the shade, are wicker chairs and divans. Our rooms are on the second floor and at the side, overlooking a narrow street. Opposite our windows is a church. The church is open all day long, and the bell, which has a slightly cracked sound that is not unpleasant, seems to ring at no stated times, but just when the fancy takes it.

An hour after our arrival, while I am still unpacking and worn out with fatigue, Miss Martin comes with a message from Mrs. Greenside. "She is quite sure that I am tired, and will I bring Molly to afternoon tea in her rooms;" we are both glad enough, and

accept gratefully. So we cross over to her rooms on the right-hand side of the house, and find that she has very large and comfortable ones, looking towards the sea. They must cost a good deal more than ours, I think to myself, but many things have made it evident that she is rich. There are all manner of pretty things and luxuries about—a brass kettle is over a spirit-lamp, and a teapot and a dainty afternoon service are put ready; they have all evidently come out of the red plush-lined case standing near. The silver-gilt fittings of her dressing-case are lying about, and as I look at them I think that it is a good thing to be a Jew or a gipsy. They are the two races that somehow inherit the world. I have heard that the one is but the outcome of the other. I do not know how this may be, but it always seems that to the Jew belongs the inside of the world—the gold and jewels and stuffs, the gorgeous rooms and piled-up coffers; and to the gipsy belongs the outside—the sky and the sunshine, the tent on the grass, the

merry road, and all the secrets of happy nature.

"Come, Mrs. Keith," Mrs. Greenside says, in the rather protecting manner she is gradually putting on, for that of the drooping traveller is fast vanishing, "I am sure you must want some tea. Now, you must sit in this chair. Miss Martin, put my two square down pillows behind Mrs. Keith's back." It is no good protesting; besides, it is very nice to be made much of, and I, little used to it, find the strange sensation too pleasant to resist. "I have seen your friends, Mr. and Mrs. Vincent, Mrs. Keith."

"But they are not my friends," I interrupt; "they are merely friends of a cousin of mine."

"Oh, but people so soon make up an intimacy abroad," she answers earnestly; and I find myself noticing that the odd thing about Mrs. Greenside is that she seldom smiles and never laughs. Life seems to her a grave and important business, in which there is no time for frivolity, or for anything that is in a sense

unworldly. "They have a charming daughter; she has quite a beautiful walk. I am very glad I have come here; Malaga all but made me ill again, did it not, Miss Martin?"

"Yes, Mrs. Greenside; it did," Miss Martin answers.

"And now, Mrs. Keith, tell me all about yourself," Mrs. Greenside says, putting down her cup, and looking me full in the face, with the air of a sympathetic person who has a right to know all one's personal history, and will not be denied.

I tell her what there is to tell: that I am alone, and worked, and that Jack died, and why we have come abroad—all as briefly as possible, and then she is satisfied. I could almost fancy that, knowing all there is to know about us, we lose some of our interest for her, as a book that is read, or a piece of yesterday's news. I am very ungrateful, and I hate myself for not liking Mrs. Greenside more, and for not trusting her, for she is very kind to me.

Suddenly the man, the useful man who does

all manner of things in the hotel, enters and hands me two letters. Doctor George has sent them to me from Malaga. He had promised to inquire if there were any, for the office opened at such uncertain hours that it seemed useless to try and get them myself; besides, I hardly expected any. The man who brought them in asks if we would like to see some lace; a woman from the town beyond Zahra has brought some to sell.

While Mrs. Greenside and Miss Martin bargain, I read my letters. They are from our two good friends; there is no one else to send us any. Mrs. Marshall writes a kind, cold letter, which is characteristic of her. She is going to Australia with her husband, on a visit to some of his relations, and does not expect to be back until the middle of next year, and she asks me to write to her at Melbourne and tell her how Molly is. The sardine sends a short note, but a kind one; it is characteristic also. He has had my letter from Marseille, and writes at once, for he knows "how slow those

Spanish beggars are, and letters take best part of a week to get anywhere in that lovely country." He is glad we are getting along all right. He is pretty well, thanks; rather down in the mouth, but that doesn't matter. By the way, some friends of his are yachting somewhere about the Mediterranean. He doesn't know where they are likely to put in, but on a beggarly little sea like that they may turn up anywhere; so, if we should come across them, I can let him know. Then there is a postscript. "Josephs is the name; you needn't say I told you to let me know. By the way, I am going to Paris next month, so, if you want anything, only tell me, and I will start it from there." So from this I gather that the friends who are yachting are interesting to the sardine, and I remember the remark about the little girl who "did not seem to see it," and wonder if she is on board.

"Surely it is the wrong time of year for yachting in the Mediterranean?" I say, as I

watch Miss Martin fold up the lace they have bought and put it carefully away.

Mrs. Greenside is a little flattered, thinking that I am alluding to her brother, and she answers with apologetic pride, "Oh, but they have a very large steam yacht, and my brother is so accustomed to her, he goes about in any weather."

Suddenly an idea strikes me. "What is your brother's name?" I ask.

"Josephs," she answers, rather coldly.

"Is he the member for ——?" I ask. It is strange how useful little odds and ends of memories are. I remember about three years since seeing the walls of —— placarded with "Vote for Josephs," but never even knew whether he was returned or not, for I am not a politician. My question pleases Mrs. Greenside, and she answers—

"Oh yes. He is exceedingly clever," she adds. "He might have been anything he pleased; but he never cared to go into Parliament till last year."

She speaks as if he had only had to open the door and walk in; evidently her brother is a very remarkable man. I wonder if she knows Mr. Cohen; but perhaps it will be wiser not to ask. I remember the letter I posted from Malaga containing an account of Mrs. Greenside, and in it I mentioned that she expected her brother and niece. Then I do not see why I should conceal my acquaintance with the sardine; there is always something unpleasant about secrets.

"Mrs. Greenside, do you know Mr. Frederic Cohen, in London?" I ask. "He lives in Princes Gardens."

"Oh yes," she says, in a slightly supercilious manner, and with the air of a person who knows every one, but only knows him as a matter of course. "He was one of the young men who were in love with Helen last season."

"Your niece?"

"Yes; but, of course, with her prospects it was impossible for anything to come of it."

"He is very rich," I say, thinking that

money may be of some advantage in her eyes.

"Oh, but money really does not matter," she answers loftily, "for my niece will have a large fortune of her own. She is an only child, and her father is very rich. She ought to make a very brilliant match, with her accomplishments and sweetness of disposition."

"I thought Mr. Cohen was related to some very old Jewish families?"

"Oh yes," she answers, as if she did not think much of that. "One of the Bowerings was very much in love with Helen last season," she adds, as if to give me an idea that by a brilliant match she did not mean marrying among her own people. "But he was a younger son; the eldest one is married."

"And eldest sons are scarce compared to younger ones," I remark, not quite knowing what to say.

"And so apt to throw themselves away," she answers sadly.

"Mr. Cohen is very good and kind," I tell

her. "He has been a staunch and generous friend to me."

"I dare say he has, dear Mrs. Keith. I can quite understand his admiring you greatly."

The colour comes to my face, for there is something unpleasant in her manner.

"He didn't admire me; he is very kind and good——" I begin quickly.

"No one could help admiring you," she interrupts softly; "and then, your sweet little child—no one could help being ready to do anything in the world for her."

WHEN we go back to our rooms I look round them curiously. They are not so grand as Mrs. Greenside's, but they will soon be cosy and homelike. The sitting-room is large and pleasant (the bedroom leads from it); when my painting things are about, and the odds and ends from the bottoms of our trunks, and some cheap bright drapery that I saw in the shop windows as we came here is put up, it will look pretty enough. It has a large balcony, with an awning of matting over it, and that alone gives the room a character. The window is open, and the bell over the way is not ringing, so we sit and listen to the faint sound of the piano in the *café* opposite the front of the hotel. In the

evening we now and then catch the twanging of a guitar; and there is a chant, half Eastern it sounds, that is already ringing in my ears, and has been ever since we entered Spain. It is sung by the gipsies, I think, and they must have known it these hundreds and hundreds of years. We shall spend many hours sitting by this window, looking out at the mountains that rise up beyond the church. There are only a few houses on the open space to the left, but they and the sugar-canes and the esparto grass make up a foreground. Round the corner is the sea; when we are on the balcony we get a good view of it and the passing ships, though they are not many. There is a shady walk just above the beach, with seats beneath the trees. It will see us often, and Molly will drink in health as she breathes the balmy air; or, for a longer walk, we can go to the place where the goats are kept, there Molly can rest awhile and have some milk. And when this does not content us, there are two or three rumbling flies, and

we can drive out a mile or two towards the vega. All these things will make up our life in Spain. The doctor's house is close by, too —a pretty house with shaded balconies around it and a garden full of orange trees. The house itself is simple enough, but contains plenty of books, and the rough old man who is both cook and housekeeper has orders to admit us whenever we like, and to let us take away as many books and oranges as we please.

Zahra is so different from Malaga; coming to it is like getting into another atmosphere. The doctor said the Moors were here, and they must have been, seeing how near it is to the cities that were their chief centres; but, as he said too, there are few traces of them. I have looked down every corner, up at every house, hoping in vain to see some sign or remembrance of them. Probably such irrigation as there is came from them, and what is left of vegetation here is owing to their first planting. Then the place has its name,

which is surely Arabic; but for the rest all signs have vanished. I shut my eyes sometimes wondering if the street was here, and what it looked like hundreds of years ago in the days of the caliphs, and then in fancy I see it. There is a Moorish gateway at one end, and the horseshoe arch stands out clear and well defined; and, tall and erect and soft-footed, the conquerors come up the street, as if from a dream, and pass by into a dream again. I see the last gleaming whiteness of their robes, the last dark face with the turban above it, vanish into the mist, and hardly realize even then that it is only my own foolish imagining. But here in Spain what strikes one most sadly of all is that the glory of the Moor is like a dream that was dreamed in Spain's brightest day, and that, vanishing, left only the darkest night behind. But whatever this place may have been, it is now entirely Spanish. Of other things and other peoples in the past it seems to have no remembrance, and of them in the present no consciousness; it is given up

to itself. No one speaks a word of any language but Spanish. Outside the hotel, there is not a foreigner of any description in all Zahra, except the doctor. They are all Spaniards of the lower middle class, or peasants, indolent, narrow, and drowsy. The hotel itself is comfortable, and it is remarkable that there are only two women belonging to it, *i.e.* the landlady and a woman who apparently comes in from her house a little way off, to act as chamber-maid in the morning and kitchen-maid in the afternoon. The landlady is a fat, vulgar, careless woman of five-and-forty, much taken up with her own flirtations, which are chiefly carried on with the proprietor of the tumble-down flies, a dirty-looking Spaniard known in the place as Don Carlos. However, luckily for her customers, Don Carlos is only able to devote the evening to her society, and during the rest of the day she looks fairly well after her business, which means that she laughs and scolds and bargains in the morning, and gossips and sleeps or walks

along the promenade, with graceful lace on her head and well-developed figure, in the afternoon. With all this, however, we in the hotel are only amused. We get fair food and plenty of it, the rooms are kept fairly clean, and the rest is nothing to us. To me, in spite of the everlasting weariness and the occasional pain I cannot shake off, this life is almost happy, for in it there is the promise that Molly may get well. The idea has fastened on me that it will be so, and brightens every hour beyond all words to describe. And everything in the world seems to know it—the great hills and the sugar-canes, the blue sky and the sunshine, the sea and the clanging bell opposite, the trees along the walk above the beach, the flowers in the doctor's garden; all these things jumbled up together and each one separately seem to know some happy secret concerning Molly, and the secret is that she will get well. Get well! It makes me laugh for joy to think of it. Oh, my dear ones who are gone, you would not grudge me my happiness? It is not forgetful-

ness of you; it is the thankfulness that one of you is left. Just one, and in her shall you live to me too, and through her shall all my world be full of contentment. It may be only the re-action of all the fear and pain, the natural coming of the light after the darkness, on which there is only again the darkness to follow; I do not know, and I dare not think.

At last everything is unpacked, I have bought the chintz and made some hangings, there are flowers from the doctor's garden in cheap pottery on the table, an easel is put up, the favourite books we brought and all the knick-knacks are put about. I look round at what is to be our home, and lift Molly up and kiss her and laugh, for it all looks bright and sunny and pretty. I carry her to the window, and we sit down on the shady balcony to watch the people beneath and the little group of beggars around the church door opposite.

"Poor man," Molly says; "poor old man. Do give him a penny, mammy dear. Throw

him my penny." So Molly's penny goes out to the brown old beggar man; and then we shift a little so as to see the street in front of the hotel, for, looking up to the right, we can see a good deal that is going on in it. This place serves as an excuse for a holiday to the people in the ugly, dusty one we have left, so twice a day we see the dirty omnibus from Malaga arrive. It rattles down the wide street, past the hotel, and farther on it stops at a little posada and stays a long time before its door, till the tired bony horses, harnessed together with rope, seem unable to fidget any more and stand quite still, unheeding even the flies. This omnibus helps to give Zahra its air of festivity, for it is a happy, gay little place, and the water-carriers, with barrels decked with green boughs on their backs or slung on mules a pace or two in front of them, must drive a good trade or they would not call out as lustily as they do day after day.

I know all the people in the hotel by sight now, except Lord Bexley, who started on an

expedition the day before we came, nearly a week ago now. So evidently Ralph Bicknell is not here, or I should have come across him, or, at any rate, have heard of him through Mrs. Greenside. Considering how small a party we are in the hotel, I wonder we have not made some acquaintance before this. One thing that keeps me apart from the rest of the visitors is that I never go down to dinner, but always sit during the evening in my own room, so that, except during the luncheon-hour or out on the walk above the beach, I seldom come across them. Moreover, Mrs. Greenside has been so intent on getting intimate with every one, that I have rather hung back. I see the Vincents every day at luncheon. We have arrived at bowing to each other as we take our seats at table, but they are some distance from me, and I have not had the courage to make my cousin's knowing them an excuse for forcing my acquaintance on them. They consist of a tall, grey-haired papa, a rather French-looking grey mamma,

and a pretty daughter. A very pretty girl is May Vincent. It is no wonder if Ralph Bicknell is in love with her. She is rather tall, and has a slight, round figure, supple and easy, as though she had lived much out-of-doors. She has a sweet oval face and soft eyes—blue, I think, though I can hardly tell for the changing light that is in them, and for the dark lashes that shade them—and she has dark brown hair that waves a little and droops low over her forehead as Clytie's did. She makes me think of Clytie, though the dimples in her face give it an air of sauciness that was quite unknown to Clytie's. There is something proud and strong about her, something in the light step and the graceful walk that first struck Mrs. Greenside—that suggests a character and a courage that will prevent her life from being either tame or colourless. I never look at her without wondering what her future will be like, what manner of man she will marry, and whether he will be Ralph Bicknell. And yet withal she looks very soft

and womanly, and as if she had the blindness and tolerance of most loving women; probably her life will be circumscribed as their lives mostly are. You have only to see her once to know that she possesses one thing—the unconscious courage of utter truthfulness. I have looked at her pretty head every day since we came, but never without feeling how easy it must be to love her; and when she turns her face towards Molly, there is an expression on it that makes my heart go out to her.

CHAPTER XIV.

To-day we make acquaintance with our neighbours. On a table in the patio, which serves as a lounge for every one in the hotel, there are some old English papers. Even to see them from a distance is fascinating; so after luncheon I summon courage to go and sit on one of the wicker chairs beneath the palms, close by them. Molly is on my lap curiously looking round and up at the great leaves above us. Suddenly Miss Vincent comes and speaks.

"I hope your little girl is better, Mrs. Keith?" she says; and then half shyly, she asks, "May I sit down by you?" and pulling another wicker chair up by mine, she

begins to talk to Molly. Molly tells her about Marseille, and the lizard, and the ship, and all the wonders she has seen since she left home. When Miss Vincent has heard all about them, she turns to me and says, "Mrs. Greenside has told us so much about Molly, we have all been longing to know her. She tells us, too, that you know some friends of ours, Mrs. Keith, and mamma has been quite curious to hear who they are."

I wish Mrs. Greenside had not been so communicative; but it does not matter, so I tell her that Alice Grey is my cousin, and had desired to be kindly remembered to them if we met. Then she becomes quite excited, as people do abroad on hearing of their friends in England, and we are immediately as intimate as if we had been a month in the same house; so Alice Grey is of some use to us, after all. Miss Vincent tells me about a ball Mrs. Grey gave last season, and asks if I was there, and wonders why we did not see each other; but I tell her that I do not go

to balls any more, and I think, but do not say so, that I did not even have the chance of going to this one.

"It was very nice," she says. "The most exquisite floor, and not too crowded. I think it is perfectly cruel to ask one to a ball and not give one room to move, don't you, Mrs. Keith? Molly, won't you come on my lap?" she asks coaxingly; "oh, do."

But Molly shakes her head, and says, "No, thank you; I want to stay with mummy. Dear mummy," she adds, kissing my dress.

"Very well," Miss Vincent answers, with an offended air. "I have a little guitar in my room which was bought at a very funny shop, near a beautiful palace in Granada, and I shall go upstairs and shut the door, and play 'Three Blind Mice' all by myself."

Molly is staring at her intensely, with wide-open blue eyes, and without taking any notice of the enticing remark about the guitar, says gravely, "You have got dimples in your face."

"You dear little thing. Don't you think

they are very ugly? It is a sad thing to have little round holes in your face; worse than having them in your frock."

"They're not holes, and they are not ugly," Molly says stoutly. "Can you play anything else besides 'Three Blind Mice'?" she asks. Evidently the mice have made an impression on her though she does not want to show it.

"Come and sit on my lap and I'll tell you all about them," Miss Vincent says; but Molly only shakes her head and hides her face against my shoulder. "You little coquette; I won't have anything more to say to you. The blind mice wouldn't look at you if they knew you were so unkind to me."

"Why, of course they wouldn't," Molly answers, with severe common sense; "blind mice can't look—can they, mother?" she asks doubtfully. Then it seems to occur to her that she ought to make some little return to Miss Vincent's overtures, so she remarks, "We threw a penny out of the window to-day to a poor man."

"I know another friend of yours," I say, for Mrs. Greenside is coming along the corridor that leads to the patio, and I know that our talk will soon be at an end—"Mr. Bicknell."

"Do you?" and she looks up quickly, and with such keen interest on her face that it is easy to see that she knows him very well indeed.

"I thought he was with you, from what Alice Grey said."

"So he is, only he has been on an expedition with Lord Bexley. He is coming back this very afternoon. Mrs. Greenside, do have my chair;" she gets up quickly, gives that lady her chair, and seizing two enormous cushions on the divan near, puts them one on the top of each other, and sits down upon them. "Low seats are so comfortable," she says.

Mrs. Greenside takes the chair with scarcely a word of thanks. She considers that girls are meant to give up to other people, and that unless they are married, and therefore at the

head of an establishment, they are not worth considering. Miss Martin told me this accidentally. "Mrs. Greenside dislikes unmarried people," she said; "that is, unmarried women. She thinks they are always in the way, and so very tiresome." Mrs. Greenside turns to me, while the diamonds on her hands sparkle, and the heavy folds of her black silk dress, that never rustles, slowly arrange themselves.

"Mrs. Keith," she asks, in her most earnest voice, "tell me how your little girl is? I should have sent Miss Martin to see, but she has been laid up with neuralgia, and every moment upstairs I have had to devote to writing to friends in England. They will be so anxious about me," she adds plaintively. "And do tell me how you are yourself."

"Thank you, we are both much better, and delighted with this place."

"I knew you would be," she says, with a sigh of satisfaction, as if she had been the means of bringing us here. "Miss Vincent, when are Lord Bexley and Mr. Bicknell to

return?" I know that she has never seen either of them, so rather wonder at the interest in her tone; it amuses me to find, too, that Mrs. Greenside speaks to Miss Vincent in the tone of one who has known her for years and takes a grave interest in her affairs. "Lord Bexley will be such an interesting man to meet," she continues, as if to account for her inquiry. "His book is charming; I have written to England for it."

"I have not read it," Miss Vincent says; "but he and Mr. Bicknell are coming back this afternoon."

"That is why Lady Bexley refused to go for a drive, perhaps. She is with your mother now. They are talking about their children." The last words are said in a sympathetic but slightly impatient voice.

"Have you many brothers and sisters?" I ask Miss Vincent.

"No, not many: only two little brothers—they are at school; and two little sisters—they are staying with mamma's sister."

Mrs. Greenside looks up quickly. "Are they half brothers and sisters?" she asks.

"Yes; mamma is not my own mother," she says gently; and, hesitating as if she thought it unkind to remember it, she adds, "She is dear papa's second wife."

Mrs. Greenside sighs. "I hope my niece will never have a step-mother," she says, with utter want of tact.

The girl looks up quickly, and answers, "Perhaps no one can be quite like one's own dear mother, Mrs. Greenside; but I am very glad that papa married again. It would have been very sad and lonely for him without a companion: she has always been so very kind to me, and I love her and am very grateful to her for making my father happy. Mamma," she says, as Mr. and Mrs. Vincent come out on their way to the street, and Lady Bexley follows them, "mamma dear, what do you think? Mrs. Keith is a cousin of Mrs. Grey's, and she knows Ralph too."

"I am very glad to meet you, Mrs. Keith," Mrs. Vincent says holding out her hand as if she desired to be friendly; "we have heard so much of Molly from Mrs. Greenside. You have come for the winter, I hear."

"Yes," I answer, grateful for her friendliness, and feeling less lonely already as we stand, Molly and I, in the midst of the pleasant little group in the patio.

"I feared your little girl was not so well yesterday as you did not come into luncheon, and we never see you of an evening. I hope you get some dinner?"

"Oh yes," I explain; "but it is brought up on a tray, and then I can read, and be near Molly in bed in the next room."

"Let me sit with Molly this evening while you go down to dinner, Mrs. Keith," May says.

"Or Miss Martin would," Mrs. Greenside puts in.

"No, thank you," I answer. "I much prefer the simple tray and the open window to the

long dinner and the hot room; but thank you very much."

"You are quite right," Mr. Vincent says, in the tone of one who feels it to be his duty to express his approval of a sensible arrangement, even though it is one he would not think of making for himself. "Take my advice, and always escape a *table d'hôte* if you can. And so you know Bicknell?"

"Yes; I knew him a great many years ago, when I was a little girl. We were play-fellows."

"Very odd, to be sure, how things turn up," he says. "Come, Caroline; we must not keep Lady Bexley waiting any longer."

"You see, Mrs. Greenside," Lady Bexley says, in an apologetic, but very formal voice, "Mrs. Vincent has persuaded me to go out, after all. I think really I was a little afraid of those terrible Spanish carriages, afraid to trust myself in one;" and she turns to follow the Vincents. But Mrs. Greenside is not by any means to be extinguished yet.

"Mr. Vincent," she says, "you seem to know everything. Do tell me how my brother will get here from Gibraltar. He would hardly bring his yacht in here. Do you suppose he would leave it at Gibraltar, and come by land; or take it to Malaga, and then come on? I don't know in which direction to turn my face to look for him."

Mr. Vincent looks at her with a little odd smile, and his stiff iron-grey moustache looks extra wiry. He has a way of saying slightly rude things in a pleasant, patronizing manner that people seldom resent.

"I should say you had better turn your face in the direction of the road," he answers. "He will probably leave his boat at Malaga, and drive over. What is his yacht called?"

"The *Flying Dutchman*."

His tone is more respectful when he hears this. "I know her. She's a fine craft; belongs to Josephs the Jew." Mrs. Greenside is silent, and looks rather annoyed. It is odd how her

pride in her relations and her half shame of their persuasion struggle. "He is a very clever man. What wonderful people the Jews are; I wish I had been one myself;" he adds.

Mrs. Greenside brightens up. "Oh, he's very, very clever," she says, with a long-drawn sigh.

Then Mr. Vincent suddenly looks at Mrs. Greenside, as if from a new point of view. "And so Josephs is your brother?" and he looks at her still more closely, as if he expected to see a hook in her nose suddenly develop itself. "Why, you must be one of the great people too, then?"

She tries to answer proudly that it is so, but her voice hesitates a little. "I suppose so, Mr. Vincent. But I wish I could say that I did wholly belong to them. My mother was not a Jewess. She was one of the Sherwins of Dorsetshire."

"I don't know them," he says.

"She was not strong, poor thing, and I fear I inherit her constitution. The Jews have

such splendid physiques," she says, determined to express some unqualified admiration of her father's race.

"Of course they have; and don't you know," Mr. Vincent says instructively, "that one proof of the Jews being the stronger race is, that if a Jew and a Gentile marry, the children are pretty sure to take after the Israelite"—she does not like this last word at all—"and the Jewish blood will show itself even after several Christian generations? Ah, they are a wonderful people. I have a great respect for them. Come, Lady Bexley; come, Caroline." And they all three slowly sally forth.

"May I come with you, Mrs. Keith?" Miss Vincent asks, as we get up, and she takes Molly's hand. She stops to say good-bye when we get to our door, but I ask her to enter and see our rooms, and she assents joyfully. "Oh, what a nice room," she cries, and wanders round, looking at the books and the little scraps of adornment. "And there is Molly on the easel. What a sweet portrait, what a

pretty thing she looks!" She laughs, and her laughter seems to make the whole room bright and happy. "Mrs. Greenside told us you painted. She is a very old friend of yours, isn't she, Mrs. Keith?"

"Oh no," I answer, in surprise. "I only met her on board the boat. She is very kind," I add, for my conscience pricks me for not liking her well enough.

"Yes, indeed she is," the girl says eagerly; "I am sure of that, only Lady Bexley has taken a dislike to her, and papa makes fun of her. I only hope Ralph won't also take a dislike to her, for he is so rude to people when he does; it is very awkward sometimes."

"Yes, it is very awkward," I answer absently, noticing how her face lights up when she mentions him; and then I make her sit down on the rocking-chair, and she turns it round a little so that she can look up at Molly's portrait as well as out at the open window. She waits half impatiently for me to speak. I know perfectly that she wants

me to talk about Ralph, and that my old acquaintance with him is the chief cause of my sudden attraction for her.

"Do tell me how you knew Ralph," she says at last. "It is odd I never heard him talk of you; but he never does talk much about people."

"I have not seen him since we were both children," I answer; "we were playfellows together."

"How nice. And did he bully you?" she asks merrily. This girl, in the full tide of youth and beauty and happiness, fascinates me; I sit opposite and look at her, it seems as if from across the world.

"Yes, he did," I answer, amused at the question; and ask in turn, "does he bully you?"

"Indeed he does," she says, with a laugh and a sigh together.

"Did he give you that?" I ask, pointing to a little half hoop of diamonds on her third finger.

She nods uneasily, and evidently does not want to talk about it.

"It doesn't mean anything," she says quickly. "Oh yes, he is very masterful," she goes on. "He thinks that women like masterful men; but I think he would be just as nice, much nicer, if he didn't always want his own way. I should know that I had mine sometimes only because he pleased to let me have it." Then, as if she had suddenly remembered something, she says, "Perhaps I shouldn't say this to you, Mrs. Keith, only you don't seem like a stranger, you knew him so long ago. Was he a nice boy?"

"Yes, very."

"I think he must have been," she says, with a sigh; and then she looks up and says, "He is very nice now, though he is disagreeable sometimes."

"So he was as a boy," I say. "When I offended him he used to pinch me," at which she laughs out joyously.

"Did he?" she exclaims. "That is just

like him. Of course he can't pinch people now, but he punishes you dreadfully if you offend him."

"Do you ever offend him?"

"Oh yes, sometimes, I suppose. But I must go. Mrs. Keith, I wonder if you would come and have some tea in our room presently? He will be back by five o'clock, and I am sure mamma would be glad to see you." But I shake my head.

"Not this afternoon," I say; "but perhaps you and Ralph—Mr. Bicknell, I suppose I must call him—will come and see me for an hour this evening. I think I must rest for a little while now."

"You look very tired," she says gently. "Would you not like to be a little while alone and quiet? Perhaps Molly would come with me for a bit. Will you, dear?"

"I'll be very, very quiet," Molly says beseechingly, "but I do want to stay with mother;" and she creeps into my arms and lies quite still.

A few hours later, just after the dinner-bell has rung, May Vincent taps softly at the door and comes in again. Her eyes are bright, and her face is flushed with happiness. A bunch of scarlet flowers is in her waist-band.

"Are you better, Mrs. Keith?" she asks.

"Yes, I am better," I answer.

"Ralph remembers you perfectly. He says you were so pretty and such a sweet little girl, and he means to fall in love with you over again."

"That is very kind of him;" and I try to laugh. "But I fear it must not be to-night, dear, for I am very tired. I think I must lie down when Molly goes to bed."

"I am so sorry—I am so sorry," she repeats softly, touching my hand. "Let us come to-morrow night. We are going for a picnic all day. You are not strong enough to go with us?" I shake my head. "I will steal in for a moment, if I may, before I go to bed to-night, just to see if I can do anything for you. Molly, you shall have one of these

scarlet flowers; Ralph brought them from the mountains; dear little Molly, and there is a kiss for you. Now keep still by mother." And with the happy smile lighting up her beautiful face, she goes down to meet her lover.

CHAPTER XV.

THIS morning all sense of weariness has gone. Molly looks well, though the doctor looks at her, as he always does, with an anxious expression on his face; it seems sometimes as if he understood all the past, and in some dim way held the secret of the future. But it is a rest and comfort to hear his voice; he is a man in whose presence it seems as if nothing can go very far wrong; it gives one strength to see him. He comes in slowly, and quite naturally taking Molly on his knee begins to talk with her, a little happy, trivial conversation such as children love. When it is over he looks round the room and admires it, and going up to Molly's portrait on the easel sees the good points and the bad ones and remarks on them. "I ought to get you some

commissions from the Spaniards," he says. "I do not know the people here very well as yet, but I will find out about them. As yet all Spaniards disappoint me; they are so apathetic."

"Apathetic?" I say, in surprise.

"They are passionate," he explains, "but they are forgetful, as passionate people usually are; and seem capable of no sustained feeling. Lord Bexley was saying this only last night."

"Is Lord Bexley interesting?" I ask.

"He is pleasant and full of fun," he answers. "I only saw him last night, when he seemed to be a little inclined to make fun of Mrs. Greenside. I am afraid she lends herself rather easily to it; but she is a very kind person." I notice that Dr. George, as he is called by every one here, always sees the best side of people. "By the way, Mrs. Keith, I have been wondering if you would care to have a piano in your room. There is my brother's, and it is spoiling for want of use. Why shouldn't you have it over here?"

"It would be very nice," I answer; "but

your brother—perhaps he would not like it to be moved."

"Oh yes; I asked him about it before he started, and he said I could do what I liked with anything in the house. I'll have it brought over, and Molly shall play to me next time I come."

"Mummy plays best," Molly says; "and she sings, but not like Jack. Jack used to sing lovely songs, and rock on the rocking-horse."

He has been told about Jack before, so he makes no answer; only kisses her and lifts her gently off his knee, and gets up to go.

"Do the Spaniards grieve very much when any one belonging to them dies?" something makes me ask.

"They accept all the inevitables with dignity," he answers, "never rejoicing or grieving over-much. But I must go. I think Molly is doing very well. Keep her out-of-doors." He is shaking hands with me, when Mrs. Greenside enters. She is delighted to get hold of him.

"I am so glad to see you," she says, in her heavy, earnest manner. "What an interesting talk you had with Lord Bexley last night. He is a delightful man."

"He is very pleasant," the doctor answers, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Now, do tell me about Mrs. Keith. Don't you think she is very fragile?" she asks suddenly.

"I am quite well," I say emphatically.

"She is so devoted to her child," Mrs. Greenside sighs.

Dr. George sees that I do not want the subject continued, so adroitly changes it.

"When are your relations coming, Mrs. Greenside?" he asks. Every one in the hotel takes an interest in Mrs. Greenside's relations.

"To-day. I have just had a telegram, and wanted to tell Mrs. Keith at once, for I knew she would sympathize with me. She understands a sensitive nature like her own;" and Mrs. Greenside sighs again.

"I am very glad they are coming; it will be a great pleasure to you," he says.

"Oh yes," she answers, with another long-drawn sigh, as if no words can measure the happiness it will give her. "I hope you and my brother will be great friends," she adds earnestly. "He delights in clever men." The doctor's eye twinkles again.

"I shall be very glad. But now I fear I must say good-bye. Then, I'll send the piano over, Mrs. Keith;" and he escapes.

"I am so glad to hear your good news, Mrs. Greenside. How did it come?" I ask her.

"Oh, they telegraphed the moment they knew where I was, and said they would start immediately," she says, as if she wondered whether I had expected they would do anything else." "How charming you have made your room. You have so much taste." And then she stands before Molly's portrait, and seems charmed by it. "It is a great thing to have your talent, Mrs. Keith," she says—"a most precious thing. I wonder if, when you

feel stronger, you would take a commission from me to paint my niece? I would give anything to have a portrait of her; not a full-size one, but one like this of Molly. Oh, there is Miss Martin. Miss Martin, do come and look at this portrait." Miss Martin comes slowly into the room and shuts the door; she stands before the easel for a few minutes.

"Yes, it is very nice; it is very like," she says gently, and goes to the window. It is an odd characteristic of Miss Martin that whenever it is possible she looks out of window.

"I am glad you like it." I feel chilly as I speak, and wrap a little black shawl over my shoulders, saying that it is cold.

"Oh, you are not well," Mrs. Greenside says, with great concern in her voice. "I could see you were not well the moment I entered. Miss Martin, where is my white Shetland shawl?"

"It is in the Indian trunk."

"Will you please get it?" and Miss Martin

goes off obediently. "Mrs. Keith, you ought really to speak to the doctor about yourself."

"It is only the reaction after all the worry," I answer. "But I will speak to him if I do not get stronger."

"You must indeed."

"He is so very kind——"

"And he is devoted to you; I could see that on board the ship."

"Devoted to me?" I say coldly, the blood going from my face, for I feel that she is making it impossible to ask personal advice from him. "He is not more devoted to me than to any one else."

"Oh yes, he is," she says earnestly.

"You must not say that," I answer; "please never to say that again, Mrs. Greenside, either to me or to any one else."

"But, my dear Mrs. Keith, why should I not say it, and how can he help admiring you?" Her tone worries more than I can say.

"Oh no, indeed; it is all a mistake. Please

never think anything of the sort again; it is cruel and untrue——"

And suddenly the door opens, and Philip the doctor's man and Don Carlos the landlady's friend appear, bringing in the piano, and the former has a basket of fresh oranges for Molly, which Doctor George has sent. Mrs. Greenside looks at me, but before she can make any remark, Miss Martin returns with the shawl. Don Carlos says that señora Manuela (the landlady) will come presently to see that the piano is placed as I like, and he bows and departs with Philip.

"Mrs. Keith, have you one of these shawls?" Mrs. Greenside asks, holding up a soft white Shetland one, so fine that it looks like lace. "Then, you must have this—you must indeed. Let me give it to you——"

"But indeed, Mrs. Greenside, I do not feel the cold, and I do not like to take so beautiful a thing——"

"Oh, but you must," she says. "It was given to me by a very sweet woman two

hours before she died. She was very dear to me, and I tried to save her life just as if it had been my own, did I not, Miss Martin?"

"Yes, Mrs. Greenside, you did," Miss Martin answers, still looking out of window, with her face turned in the direction of the sea.

"And she died?'' I ask Mrs. Greenside, with a shudder. Somehow the history of the shawl fascinates me.

"Oh yes, she died," Mrs. Greenside, says in a voice of compassion, but as if dying had been a matter of course; "and the last time I saw her, she took this shawl off her shoulders and put it on mine. I never saw her afterwards, and I have never worn it since, and now I want you to have it. You won't mind accepting it as a token of my great admiration for your courage in coming all this way alone with your child."

"But there is nothing to admire in that. It is only what any mother would do."

"All mothers would not feel so," she sighs;

"but, dear Mrs. Keith, your little child is so sweet I do not wonder at your devotion to her." And so in a minute she makes me grateful. Suddenly Miss Martin turns from the window; I fancy that there are tears in her eyes, but it must be only fancy.

"Mrs. Keith," she says, "Mrs. Greenside does not want me just now. Shall I take your little girl for a walk?" I look at her in surprise. She is generally too much like a machine to think of this kind of thing. "Perhaps you are not well enough to go out yourself to-day?" she says; "you look very tired."

"I want to stay with you, mother," Molly pleads.

For some unknown reason I cannot bear to refuse Miss Martin's offered kindness.

"I wish you would go, darling. You might gather some flowers for me," I say; and she assents. So I tie on her little white calico hood, and she goes off in the sunshine with Miss Martin towards the walk by the sea.

"Have the Vincents made up their picnic?" I ask Mrs. Greenside.

"Yes," she answers. "The Vincents and Lord and Lady Bexley and that Mr. Bicknell."

"Tell me what Mr. Bicknell is like."

"He is nothing remarkable," she answers. "But no doubt the Vincents are anxious to see their daughter married. Girls are great responsibilities until they are married; they are like trees waiting to be planted."

"But you are not anxious to see your niece married?" I say maliciously.

"Oh, but she is like my own child; and I should be glad to see her married too, only I feel that so few young men of the present day are worthy of her. I shall bring her in to see you as soon as she comes, if you are not downstairs. Sometimes when you are tired you must make her play to you," she adds.

"Is she very musical?"

"Oh yes," she answers, in a tone that signifies that as a matter of course she is

everything. It is quite certain that Mrs. Greenside is very staunch to her relations; it is impossible to help liking her for it.

I wonder a great deal what Miss Josephs will be like, and whether she cares for the sardine, and if people here will take kindly to Mrs. Greenside's relations, for they do not care much about her. They will stay three or four weeks at least, Mrs. Greenside thinks, and the only thing that appears to disturb her is that Lord and Lady Bexley are going away soon. They (the Bexleys) want to get back to Italy, to a villa they have somewhere near Bordighera, and where they expect friends from England immediately after Christmas. "Of course, my brother will delight in meeting Lord Bexley," Mrs. Greenside explains; "he is so very interesting, and full of information."

When Molly comes back, Mrs. Greenside and Miss Martin go away together, and leave me with the remembrance of their kindness, and with the dead woman's shawl about my shoulders. As they go out of the door, Molly

runs after Miss Martin and puts her arms round her neck and kisses her.

"Take me out again another day," she says.

Miss Martin colours, and says in her mechanical manner, "I will, if Mrs. Greenside can spare me;" and follows her employer from the room.

It takes me by surprise; she took no notice of Molly on board ship, and has no ways that please a child. I wonder what has happened and yet I do not like to question Molly; it would seem like looking into some recess into which I am not meant to see. But Molly soon tells me all about it of her own accord.

"Oh, mummy dear," she says, "we went a little way, and sat down and looked at the ships, and then Miss Martin began to cry because her brother had gone a long way across the sea, and hadn't said good-bye to her. And then I told her about Jack, and how he used to sing; and then she told me that once

her brother was a little boy, and she used to love him very much, and they used to have all manner of games together, but now he is a man, and it isn't half so nice as when he was a little boy; and then she cried and I didn't know what to do, so I cuddled her up and kissed her and told her not to cry, and she called me a little darling."

"Poor Miss Martin."

"Yes; and she has got a little tiny penknife in her purse, and it has been there ever since her brother was a little boy——"

She stops and looks tired and faint; the fatigue has been too much for her. I take her on my lap to rest, and soon she is asleep; but her breathing is short, the fever burns on her face, and for a moment all the old fears come back.

The landlady enters to arrange a place for the piano, she looks at Molly carelessly and shrugs her shoulders. She dislikes children, and it is an unfortunate thing that the only woman-servant in the house seems also to

dislike them. Señora Manuela stops before Molly for a moment with a curious expression on her face.

"Ah!" she says, "she will never be strong. It is no use wishing the weak to live. What are they to do with life?"

"One's own child," I answer, while my heart turns cold.

"It is not one's self, but one's child, for whom you should desire what is best," she says, with another shrug of the shoulders. "Life is not always best;" she looks at me and laughs, as if to let me see that she says it from no ill feeling, but from calm, philosophical foresight. "My sister had a child; it was ill for three months," she goes on. "Ah, poor dear, it was a good thing when it died: it is no good living to bear pain." She says all this more to herself than to me as she leaves the room. The door does not fasten easily; without thought of the sleeping child, she rattles the catch, and finally bangs the door.

Molly awakes with a start, and looks about

her. "Poor Miss Martin; I am so sorry for Miss Martin's little brother, mummy," she says, and closes her sweet eyes again; when she is once more asleep, I carry her into the next room and put her gently down on the bed, and sit beside her and watch. She is still sleeping when, two hours later, Mrs. Greenside taps at the sitting-room door again, and enters with a girl beside her.

"Mrs. Keith," she says, "this is my niece. She is very tired with her journey, but I wanted her to come at once to see you and your little Molly."

I look at the girl curiously. She is fair and pale. She has a long nose, soft grey eyes, and pretty light hair twisted round her head, much in the fashion that I wear mine. I notice instantly that she has very beautiful hands. She wears a simple black gown, and no ornaments of any kind. I say some polite words of greeting, and as she looks up I see, almost with surprise, the sweetness of the smile that lights up the shy, grave face.

"I am very glad to meet you," she says. "My aunt has told me of your kindness to her. I hope I may come and see your little girl to-morrow, when I am rested."

She says it in a low musical voice that makes me long to hear her speak again; but she seems a little frightened, and looks at me with a look that says, "Let me go away," and I do not try to keep her.

CHAPTER XVI.

It is half-past eight. Molly is asleep, my dinner-tray has gone down, the window is open, and I can hear the piano going in the *café* opposite. Just now the last omnibus rattled past the corner, on its way back to Malaga. I wonder it goes safely along the rough, unlighted roads; but these Spanish mules have a safe and sleepy instinct that carries them anywhere without stumbling. The queer old man who serves as waiter and general attendant during the latter half of the day, brings in the lamp and a little pile of papers Dr. George has sent over, thinking I should like to see them; but I am too tired to drag myself from the lumpy cushions even to read the news from home. I fear sometimes that

I am growing stupid; things are becoming a little blunted all round. I cannot think, or read, or work, or care for things as keenly as formerly; all my longing is just to get on to this sofa and rest, just to know that Molly is well, or that she is sleeping peacefully in the next room, then all the world and all it has may slip by.

But this is just a passing phase; life is not so feeble that it cannot struggle against it, and all the hopes and longings and ambitions will come back. This place, in which we are strangers, and in which the few people we know are happier and stronger and better than ourselves, throws me back on myself too much, and deepens the shadows in my lot. In England it was easy to find so many poor and sick and sorrowful, longing for sympathy, and aching even for such little help as I could give, and in sight of their lives it was impossible to cry out at one's own griefs—almost impossible not to lose remembrance of them, to a certain extent, in the

longing and eagerness to enter into their lives, and to help them and comfort and make them, even for ever so small a space, a little happier and brighter, a little freer from pain, a little less cold and hungry. But here one is thrown on one's self so sadly, and above all things is alone. To some men it might perhaps be best, but to a woman it is terrible. But this feeling will pass. What slaves we are to the lower side of ourselves, and how flesh and blood can master us. A little pain, a single blow, a little derangement of so many atoms, a little failure in the mere mechanical working of our bodies, and the strongest and the weakest are on the same level; and genius, and intellect, and learning, and noble aspirations, and all longings and strivings, where are they?

Some one in the street beneath passes by, singing the gipsy chant, or what I take to be the gipsy chant. It seems as if my soul goes out to follow the voice down the dim street, along by the trees towards the

still sea, over the uneven ground with the rough stones and the tracks of sand. I can feel the cool breeze blowing. I look up and see the steelly blue of the sky, and far away at sea there is a light, and over the waves I go—the smooth, cold waves that have but little foam on them, and that climb and roll over and over each other from sheer restlessness, as people toss in their sleep; for in this still wind and beneath this blue sky they do not seem to be alive with all the life that is theirs in the storm, or with the joyousness that is theirs in the sunshine, and they are not full of all the strange memories that moonlight gives them. They do not know that I am going on and on, and over and over them wave after wave, towards the ship at sea. I go softly, and the little breeze hurries me on so secretly. How warm it will be on board! how cosy and bright in the saloon, with the passengers all about, and the lamps, and the books, and the bright glasses above the table, and the sound of the screw as we go on and on

towards the land. What land? Oh, tell me this! what land is it they are going to? Not a strange land, but the dear one in which the woman lying on the sofa at Zahra played when she was a little girl, among the fields at Minehead; the land in which her best loved was carried home with the water dripping from his hair; the land in which her little son lies sleeping. I wonder what the bride is doing in St. John's Wood, and if she understands the picture on the easel yet; if she ever looks at it, and thinks of the people who walked round and round the trim garden before it was all overgrown with rank tall grass, and the sea-weed was piled up on the shore lower down, and—— But some one is here. Ah yes, I understand: I am the woman at Zahra, and the woman in the dream is gone; she is not me, and I do not know where she may be. She is some poor soul who comes and rests in my body awhile, and goes out on strange journeys, and whispers them all into my dreaming ears, and then is gone again. I get

up and smooth my rumpled hair. It is very golden, I think as I look in the glass—a pale, bright gold, like the sunshine of an early summer day. I pour some eau-de-cologne on the top of the mass of plaits, just to awaken me, and then open the door.

"I was half asleep," I say. "Come in; I am so glad to see you both;" and May Vincent enters, followed by a man. The man is fairly tall and well made; he has brown eyes and dark brown hair, and he is distinctly good-looking.

"Dear Mrs. Keith," May says gently, but in a happy, satisfied voice, "I have brought Ralph to see you."

"How do you do?" he says, and looks at me for full a quarter of a minute, shaking my hand, as if while he did so he thought of all the bygone days. "How strange we should come across each other at last. I have often thought of you."

They come in, we gather round the open window, and by the dim lamplight he and I

look at each other again, long and curiously, across the memories of all the years that have passed since we met.

"Why, we used to see each other nearly every morning;" he laughs, and I wonder if he is thinking of the kiss we climbed up the fence to give each other the day we parted. He has a merry laugh, and his face lights up and is at its best when he is amused.

"I remember it all so well," I say; and we look at each other again. It is so strange to meet as man and woman, we who have always thought of ourselves as children together, whenever we thought at all.

"You were rather a pretty little girl, Maggie." I almost start; it is so long since any one called me by that name. "May tells me you contemplate calling me Mr. Bicknell," he remarks, as if he understood how odd the sound of my own name had been to me.

"People contemplate many things they never do," I answer; and then we talk the

old days and haunts of childhood over, wondering if it be really true that we are grown-up people now.

"I asked Mrs. Keith if you used to bully her, Ralph, and she assures me that you did," May says, when we have laughed over our old squabbles. "I believe you were a very disagreeable boy."

"Do you, miss?" he answers grandly, just in the manner he used to answer me years ago. It brings mornings in the field and games in the wood all back before my eyes with a rush. "I never bullied any one; I was particularly amiable when I was a boy, as I am now," he adds solemnly.

"Oh!" she cries.

"I believe we used to be sweethearts," he says, looking at me with another laugh.

"Then the sweetness was all on my side," I answer, rather ungraciously; but I am thinking of his pinches.

"And the heart too," he answers; "for you certainly had mine in those days."

"I did not deserve so pretty a speech as that," I reply humbly.

"That is so like you," he says; and then he turns to May. "She always used to acknowledge when she was wrong, even in a trifle. She was very humble and repentant when she had offended me."

"Well?" she says.

"Well," he echoes, "why don't you repent when you offend me, and acknowledge when you are wrong?" They are just like big boy and girl together; it is very curious to watch them.

"So I do," she says, after a moment's hesitation; "I always do. I am too proud not to do so. Only a coward is afraid to make amends, or to own when he is in the wrong."

She looks proud enough as she says it; her voice is eager, and her eyes are raised to his for a moment. He looks at her, and then at me, and then at her again; and I know perfectly that he is thinking how beautiful she is, and that there is a beautiful

nature behind those fearless eyes. He is thinking, too, how bright she is, with her youth and happiness and utter unconsciousness of sorrow; and I do not know why, but I feel somehow that he is resolving in his heart that he will guard her from all the sorrow and pain that have set their mark for ever on me. He turns from her and looks at my hands. They are lying on my lap, little thin white hands, with the wedding-ring so loose that it slips, and would fall off but for the band of pearls that guards it. Then he looks up at my face, and while I know that he is sorry for me, I feel that it is less on account of all I have suffered than for the traces it has left.

"It is so strange to meet you again," he says gravely. "I can hardly believe it is you, and that you—you have been married and have children; only one child, though, is it?"

"One now; there were two."

"Why, it's twenty years since we met. You must be nearly thirty, Maggie."

It is not a wise speech to make to a woman. Happily I do not mind it.

"It must be quite twenty years," I answer, "for I was thirty a month ago."

"Were you, Mrs. Keith?" May exclaims. "You look about seven-and-twenty; Mamma was saying so to-night. Why, you are only two years younger than Ralph."

"Yes, it is very odd to meet as old fogies," I say to him, looking across the girl between us.

"I don't feel in the least like an old fogie," he answers.

"Neither do I."

"There is not the least occasion to get old unless one chooses," he says. "I intend to be as independent of Time as the world itself, which gets young again every year."

"And old also," I add maliciously.

"We'll forget that side of the argument," he laughs. "Is that your child's portrait?" he asks; he gets up and examines it critically. "It is rather well done," he says, with some hesitation, as if he had half expected it to be badly done, and is surprised.

"Do you think she is pretty?" I ask, for he has said nothing about Molly's face, and yet I have caught its sweetest, dreamiest look.

"It is a nice little face," he answers; —"children are a great deal alike, you know," he adds, with a little laugh, as if he thought the remark a joke.

"We are here for her health's sake," I tell him. "She is not strong."

"So May said;" but he does not add a word of sympathy. "I wonder Bournemouth, or some of those places, would not have done as well for her," he remarks, in a voice that gives me to understand that he really thinks the coming here to have been over-great an effort to make for so young a child.

"Do you like children?" I ask him, as I put the easel a little on one side.

"I don't think I do particularly," he answers; "but I shall like to see your little girl;" and then he says gently, "I thought of you, Maggie, when I saw your father's death in the paper years ago. I should have

written, only I did not know whether you would remember me; or where you were." May is some little distance off while he speaks, and seems not to hear what he is saying.

"Thank you, Ralph," I say gratefully. "Do you remember him well?"

"Perfectly," he answers, "and can see him riding along the Minehead lanes now. He always sat bolt upright, and had a way of looking over the hedges as he went along, as if he expected to drop on a poacher."

There is a frank manliness and a certain simplicity about him as he speaks; I begin to understand why May likes him. Suddenly I hear Molly coughing uneasily in her sleep, and go to her. As I leave the room a guitar is twanging in the street, and they step out on to the balcony to listen to it.

I stay a few minutes with Molly, arranging her pillow and listening to her breathing, and gently smoothing her soft hair. It is a comfort to be with her again after the hour's absence, and they will not miss me in the next

room. I sit and think of all that life has given me since the days when Ralph and I were playfellows, and am thankful enough for my lot, even for all the sorrows—that they have been mine to bear, and not another woman's.

Presently, when Molly is sleeping soundly again, and has ceased to cough, I go back to my visitors. They are still on the balcony, and do not see me for a moment. I hear Ralph say, "You little goose," and he puts his hand on her shoulder just for a moment, but she shakes it off. I cannot quite make them out. They are evidently very fond of each other; there seems to be some understanding between them, and yet they do not seem to be exactly engaged. May looks round and sees me.

"Do come on the balcony, Mrs. Keith," she says; "it is so lovely."

So I go out; a clock close by begins to strike, and a bell rings out in the distance; we hear a man's voice singing, and listen till

it dies away. We stand silently looking at the stars and the sky, and the white church opposite; far beyond we see the twinkling lights at sea—not many, only two or three perhaps, but they set me journeying into the far-off again, and I think of the picture on the easel, and the rocking-horse in the nursery, and of the little bride, and wonder if she is laughing. I must not forget to write to poor nurse to-morrow. When we left England she was broken-hearted at all that had happened, and was going to Germany, to her son's wife.

May gives a long sigh. "The world is very lovely," she says softly, "if people were only worthy of it."

"And pray, who is unworthy?" Ralph asks, evidently rather astonished at the remark.

She laughs a little. "You and I, perhaps," she says.

"I don't feel particularly unworthy," he answers.

"You self-righteous person," she says

reproachfully; and then she adds, "I promised Lord Bexley to remind you of the billiards at nine o'clock, and nine o'clock struck half an hour ago."

"Then why didn't you remind me half an hour ago?"

"Don't speak in a masterful tone, sir. I told Mrs. Keith that you liked being masterful."

"Did you?" he answers, in a still more masterful manner. "You seem to have been amusing yourself by abusing me to Mrs. Keith to your heart's content."

"Not to my heart's content at all," she says, with merry mock humility, "but quite the reverse, indeed. Alas, alas."

"Why didn't you tell me when it was nine o'clock, miss?"

"An' please, sir, we found your company so pleasant I thought it would be a pity to lose it," she answers saucily; at which he laughs and gives his head a little toss, and says he wishes she would learn to treat her elders with respect.

"Respect!" she laughs. "It is so absurd to expect respect, isn't it? When you are at home and official, then it is quite different." She does not explain what she means, and I do not like to ask.

"I can't fancy Ralph official," I say.

"Can't you?" he says absently. "Well, I shall have to go back soon, I fear, and then you must fancy it if you think of me at all." He looks at May again for a minute. "I am teaching her Spanish," he says.

"And scolds me dreadfully," she interrupts. "But I am stupid, and he will go to such very difficult writers."

"We have been learning some maxims in the 'Conde Lucanor.' Let us see, May; what was it you stumbled over so long? 'Quien te alabare con lo—'"

"I won't listen," she cries merrily, and stuffs her fingers into her ears. "I am not in school to-night."

"Obstinate thing!" he exclaims; and then they wish me good-night, and he asks if he

may come again, " without this frivolous young person," looking at May with an expression in his eyes that must surely satisfy her ; and then they go away together, laughing and chattering down the staircase like a couple of merry school-children. I listen to their voices curiously ; they are like an echo that has travelled on through all the years.

How strange it has been to meet him again. I sit down to wonder a bit about all that is between them, and how it will end ; but instead, I find my thoughts going off to the old days at Minehead—not to the days when Ralph and I were boy and girl together, but to the days when my husband first came to the inn to paint. He was there a whole summer, and we knew him only by sight ; but when he came a second summer, my father thought he had earned a right to be recognized and, having made acquaintance, liked him. After that he was always at our house, and almost without knowing it we seemed to grow to each other. It was not that we fell in love—that

seems to signify something too sudden and violent; it was just that our two lives grew together, until insensibly they became one. And at last it hardly seemed necessary to tell me that he loved me; there was no occasion for promises and vows between us such as most lovers bind themselves with. I knew he loved me long before he spoke, just as he knew, before any saying of "yes" or "no" that when he asked me I should be his wife. Do we not turn naturally to our own home when the time comes to go to it? and so I turned to him, the home that knew and welcomed me, and had waited till I was ready. I had no thought of his not loving me, no fear, no dread of his not understanding this or that, no more than he had of my failing him. We knew that all the world might pass, and all the stars sweep by, but we should just stand together, without doubt or fear or question of each other. Was it a very tame love-making? I do not think so. It was the calm, still beauty of a summer that does not wane. We did not

need storms and clouds and cold gusts, and sudden sunshine, and all that more uncertain lovers need, to test our strength. There is a love that knows no doubt or fear or change, that is far deeper and more passionate than that which is always protesting and making signs to show it has not vanished. The sea is not deepest where the restless waves ebb and flow and toss their snowy crests upon the shingly beach; but far out, where it flows still and smooth and there are no stones and rocks to spend its strength upon. It seemed so strange that we had ever been apart, there was no fear of anything coming between us when we were once together. How strange it seems that even Death had power to take one and leave the other. Yet even death is not so strong as love, and it has left us that, though one sleeps on not knowing, and the other sits here and waits. I think sometimes that death must be a sadder thing to those who love less. Ah! but I am speaking in spite of my own heart. But it is so; for had we loved each

other less, had there been doubts, and fears, and hopes, and misgivings, as there are between those two who went laughing down the stairs just now, I could not have borne the agony of the end, the vanishing of all possibilities, the thinking it all over—of wondering how this had been, and what that had meant, the sense that never again could one thing be set right and another explained, or protestations tell how much or how little we had felt. The love that wanes, and squabbles, and changes with the wind, and grows cold when time and space have come between, or that hangs on a word and is for ever questioning itself and its fellow, is it worth having; is it worth calling love at all? Ah, poor heart that has to depend on it, you have perhaps the little joys of earth, but you miss the calm of heaven.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FORTNIGHT has passed since Mrs. Greenside's relations arrived, and since Ralph and May first came to see me. The latter have been many times since, but never to stay long. Molly has been ill, though she is better again now; I have been ill too, and but for the anxiety about Molly I should have broken down altogether. It seemed as if some terrible thing was overtaking me; a dread I could not express was dogging me, but I kept my lips shut, and, when Dr. George came, tried to look bright and to talk, and he did not even suspect what the effort cost me. After all, it was only the re-action, and now that Molly is looking well again I am getting better too. Only this craving for happiness is on me still, the sick disappointment at not getting strong.

I hate my own selfish impatience, and think again and again of the many worse lots there are in the world, but it does not reconcile me to the possibilities in my own. Age perhaps gets used to sorrow and pain and makes them its sad companions, but till one is old how is one to help longing for health and brightness? And yet with youth and age alike I suspect it is the same. We may keep our lips shut, and hear our silence called resignation and many fine names; but wear what garments we will, our poor human hearts beat the same beneath them all.

I am glad that we are here in this little inn and among these pleasant people. It is impossible to help liking them, or to help being interested in their lives and those things that are much to them. Now that Molly is better again I am content. They have all been kind to us and paid us visits. Even Ralph, who confessed that he did not care for children, likes Molly, and plays with her and caresses her; and he is never tired of going

over old times with me. I have tried to make him talk about May, but he always avoids it, though he assents cordially to all I say in her favour and seems pleased when her name is mentioned.

"We must get you out for a drive," he said yesterday; "it would do you and Molly good. I will try to-morrow to find something in the shape of a carriage that won't jolt the life out of us. Would you like to go out with me, Molly?"

"Yes, *very* much," Molly answered; "but mother too?"

"Oh yes; mother too," he laughed. "I wouldn't take you without her for the world; I might lose you by the way. Perhaps May will go with us if you will ask her?" he suggested.

"Or if you ask her," I said, amused at his manner.

"Then it will depend on the young lady's temper. She is as perverse as she can be just now."

"I dare say it is your fault."

"Oh, no doubt it is; at the same time, any one more——" But the entrance of Mrs. Greenside put an end to our talk.

We have not seen much of Mrs. Greenside lately. She is always kind and anxious, but now that her brother is here she is a good deal taken up with all that is going on in the house. Miss Josephs comes in very often, and I like her, though I have not learnt to know her very well. She talks more to Molly than to me. The soft sweet voice in which she first spoke is natural to her; she never raises it, and her smile is never less sweet than on that first day when it caught my fancy, but I know little more of her. Yes, she plays well; the beautiful hands seem to have a charm in them when they touch the piano. I could fancy that all her soul goes down to her finger-ends and finds some strange sympathy in the keys. A haunting voice seems in them—a yearning and tenderness, a memory of many things of which the

girl who is playing knows nothing. I sometimes look at her and wonder what is behind the pale face, with the soft shy eyes. There is something very maidenly and gentle about her, so that I think the poor sardine's chance cannot be a very good one; for he is hardly the man to take the fancy of this simple damsel. He would please a merry, laughing, dashing woman of the world better. His good-heartedness and straightforwardness, and all his solid virtues, are things she would know how to value; but this girl would only take them as a matter of course, and expect, besides, a more heroic, more romantic lover than I fear it is possible for the sardine to be. I spoke to her about him once, but she did not seem much interested—only said, with a little smile, "aunt told me you knew him, Mrs. Keith," and changed the subject. Her father came to see me one day last week. Mrs. Greenside brought him in, and he at once talked of Mr. Cohen.

"My sister tells me you know Frederic

Cohen," he said. "He's a very decent fellow, a very good fellow indeed. I don't know how it was we did not see more of him."

"I am very glad to hear you say so. He was a staunch friend to me when I was in a great deal of trouble," I answered.

"I can quite believe it," Mr. Josephs said. "I have always found him with the right notions about him. He ought to be in Parliament. He is very sound in his views, and I mean to do my best for him."

"He has very sensible views," I said.

"He has very sensible views indeed," Mr. Josephs repeated. "I remember particularly his remarks about this country, and I have lately proved the truth and value of them for myself."

"Do you like Spain?" I asked, though I knew what his answer would be.

"Like it!" he exclaimed bitterly, as if all the persecutions of centuries were in his mind. "It is not possible to like it. I have never felt more strongly about anything in

my life than I do about Spain. Its very form of government—— But then, a lady knows nothing about politics. I feel a compassion for the country itself. It has climate and beauty—everything but a people to bless it."

"And the people?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Have done their best to spoil it. The bare, barren land, face to face with this cloudless sky, is a shame and reproach to the lazy, helpless people that encumber it. The Spaniards have done literally nothing for themselves, and have undone all that has been done for them."

"But this is a reproach to their rulers rather than to the people," Mrs. Greenside said. "Individually they are surely well enough; the people are not responsible for the laws they have to obey."

He shook his head. "People make their own laws in these days—indirectly, of course, but still they make them, if they choose. Spain is too far behind the century to have

found this out. The people are warped and priest-ridden and callous."

"One never imagines till one comes here that Spaniards are callous and apathetic, but expects to find them full of fire," I said.

"So they are when they are roused, fire of a wrong kind; in any good, manly cause they are never conspicuous. And, apart from their public morals, the people are not good individually, Mrs. Keith; they are cruel and lying and passionate. Where we at worst use fists, they use knives."

"But this is from uncontrolled passions," Mrs. Greenside said, with the air of a person being coached up for an important conversation in the future.

"Yes, it is from uncontrolled passions," he answered, "and from centuries of misrule; a people wholly destitute of sympathies and overweighted with superstitions, with a barren land and an all but bankrupt exchequer."

"And why are the French and Italians so different?" I asked.

"The French have a love of country and enthusiasms that save them from many things, and the Italians have their simple tastes and love of nature——"

"The Germans have also a great love of country," Mrs. Greenside began, as if she were trying the effect of a remark.

"What nonsense, Harriet; we don't want to discuss all the nations on earth," Mr. Josephs said quickly; and then turning to me, he went on, "I have been much struck in watching the landlady here. She sits in the evening fanning herself and talking to her lover. The other night a sick dog lay down at her feet; she kicked it away——"

"Oh, but perhaps she does not like animals," Mrs. Greenside said.

"I was going on. A few minutes later a deformed boy, with the disease in his eyes that is the curse, or one of the curses, of Southern Spain, came up and said something. She treated him with open disgust, and, turning to her companion, said it was a pity he was

allowed to live; the deformed and the sick ought to die."

"What did the boy say?" I asked, with a shudder, vowing that her hands should never touch Molly.

"Not a word; that is the curious part of it. To him it was only the expression of natural cruelty—cruelty that was not in her alone, but in him too; he will mete it out to others as it is meted out to him. No doubt he throws stones at foreigners, and especially at women, already."

"Perhaps she is a disciple of Darwin, and believes in the survival of the fittest," Mrs. Greenside said earnestly, but with a slightly abashed manner. She is a clever woman, and by the light of recent theories often makes appropriate remarks, but she seems a little afraid of her brother, and does not talk as well as usual before him.

"Then she should despair of herself," he said, with grim humour. "She is as little fit to survive, or less, than the boy she insulted.

If she marries this Spaniard with whom she spends most of her time, and has children, they may take after her."

"Mr. Josephs, you are worse than Mr. Cohen about the Spaniards."

He laughed at the remark. "Our race does not owe them much," he said bitterly.

"Ah, but the days of persecution are passed."

"Only because the safety of persecution has passed. I do not believe that the Spaniard is one whit less cruel now than in the days of the Inquisition. His religious fervour has cooled, but not his love of cruelty, as the bull-fight proves. Give him the excuse, and he would enjoy a burning as much as ever."

He stopped suddenly, as if he thought he had expressed quite enough opinion regarding Spain, and asked after Molly.

"She is better, thank you," I answered. "She is out there on the balcony with your daughter."

"Is she?" and he got up with a pleased expression on his face, and went to the window

and saw Helen in the low chair, which had been placed round the corner to shelter it from any possible draught, nursing Molly. "Why, Nellie, you make quite a picture. So that's your little one, eh, Mrs. Keith?"

"I want to come to you, mummy," said Molly.

"Oh, Molly," pleaded Miss Josephs. "Have I not been kind to you?"

"Yes, you are very kind," Molly said beseechingly; "but I do like being with mother so."

"Of course you do. Father dear, shall I come and read to you, or what would you like to do?" and she gave Molly up to me.

"Well, let me see. I suppose you are ill, Harriet?" he asked, as if Mrs. Greenside's illness was a matter of course.

"You know I am never well," she said reproachfully, as she went off with her relations.

"Mrs. Keith, if you are writing to Cohen at any time, you can give him my very kind regards," Mr. Josephs looked back to say.

"He is very vulgar," I heard Mrs. Greenside remark. "I wonder you encourage him. I know Helen did not like him."

"Ah, that was because you put her up to it. I think he is a very decent fellow."

All this was said as they went downstairs to the patio, and all the hotel as well as myself could hear it.

I wish now I had told Mr. Josephs of the sardine's letter. It was only the chance to speak of it that I wanted, and somehow that did not arise. It came two days ago, and this is what it said:

"DEAR MRS. KEITH,

"Your letter was very welcome. You have fallen in with the young lady, and I have no doubt she and her father have had a good time without their amiable relation. I see you are as bad as the rest of your sex, and determined not to let one have any peace. Still, if Miss Josephs is willing, I will do my best to please you. She did not seem willing

last time I saw her, but the best of a feminine mind is, that you never know how soon it will change. Let me know when she arrives. I am half in mind to come and see you; might get offered a passage home in the *Flying Dutchman.* No place like a yacht for quarrelling—or the reverse. Don't be surprised if I turn up one morning; in fact, I should but for Mrs. Greenside. That gentle female was too much for me last time, and might be again. I hope the little girl is better. Glad you have cut Malaga. Told you the Spaniards were a bad lot, and you'll find Josephs will agree with you and me. To return to the other subject: she is a very nice little girl, if Mrs. Greenside hasn't spoilt her.

"I should like to hear from you very much when there is any news.

"Yours ever,

"F. COHEN."

I wonder what will be the end of it? I do

not like to write and raise hopes that may never be realized, and, though the father is evidently prepossessed in the sardine's favour, the daughter has not made a sign of caring for him in any way. On the whole, I come to the conclusion that it will be wiser not to write at all just yet, but to wait and see how things go on. It would not be pleasant if he came here only to be refused.

Mr. Josephs' account of the landlady haunts me; it confirms all that I had felt about her myself. I wish I could hear of a good French or English maid, for if these kind people staying here now go away before we do, and I fall ill, who will wait on Molly? It would be impossible to trust her to these cruel Spaniards.

A week later, when I am again thinking this over, May Vincent and Helen Josephs come in to ask if they may put Molly to bed? She is a sort of plaything to these happy girls, and they are never tired of doing things

for her. When Molly is in bed they both stay to talk, and I think each half wishes the other would go away. At last, May, who has evidently a bit of news that surprises her, can restrain her merry tongue no longer.

"Lord and Lady Bexley are not going to Bordighera after all, Mrs. Keith," she says. "They are going to the Pyrenees, and they do not start for a fortnight, so they will be here longer than we expected."

"Yes?" After all, there is nothing remarkable in that.

"And they have asked Mrs. Greenside and Miss Martin to go with them, and she will go, we think——"

"And leave her brother?" I ask, in surprise. After all her professions of affection, and after they have come so far on purpose to see her, it seems a little odd that she should leave her relations behind in this little place, for they are going to stay over Christmas. Mr. Josephs does not want to get back to England before the Session begins.

"Oh, papa won't mind," Miss Josephs says; "he likes aunt to enjoy herself, and she often gets tired of us after a little while."

It is strange that Lady Bexley should invite Mrs. Greenside, for neither she nor Lord Bexley appeared to like her at first. It surprises me too that Mrs. Greenside did not mention the arrangement, for she was in here to day, and she generally tells everybody all that she is going to do; but this is soon explained away by her niece.

"Aunt has been envying Lord and Lady Bexley so much," the little Jewess goes on, "and saying how many things her state of health makes her miss;—it has made her miss seeing Granada, for one thing. And then she told Lord Bexley that she wished she were going to the Pyrenees, that it would be so interesting to watch whether they would inspire him sufficiently to write another book; quite suddenly this afternoon Lady Bexley went up to her and asked her if she would care to go with them. I think it took her

by surprise, for they have not been very intimate."

"But if Mrs. Greenside is not able to go even to Granada, surely she cannot get to the Pyrenees?" I say.

"Poor auntie said it would be a great undertaking for her, but she is so fond of intellectual society she evidently cannot resist accepting the invitation——"

Suddenly Molly calls from the inner room, "I only want just to kiss you, mummy dear;" and she puts her arms around my neck, and says, "Poor mother, do you remember how you used to cry about Jack? Poor dear Jack, I have been thinking of him."

Miss Josephs comes to the bedroom door almost before I have time to answer, and says, "May has gone down, Mrs. Keith. She is coming to see you after dinner, with Mr. Bicknell, I think. Shall I play to you a little while? I know you like to hear me sometimes," she adds, as if to apologize for asking.

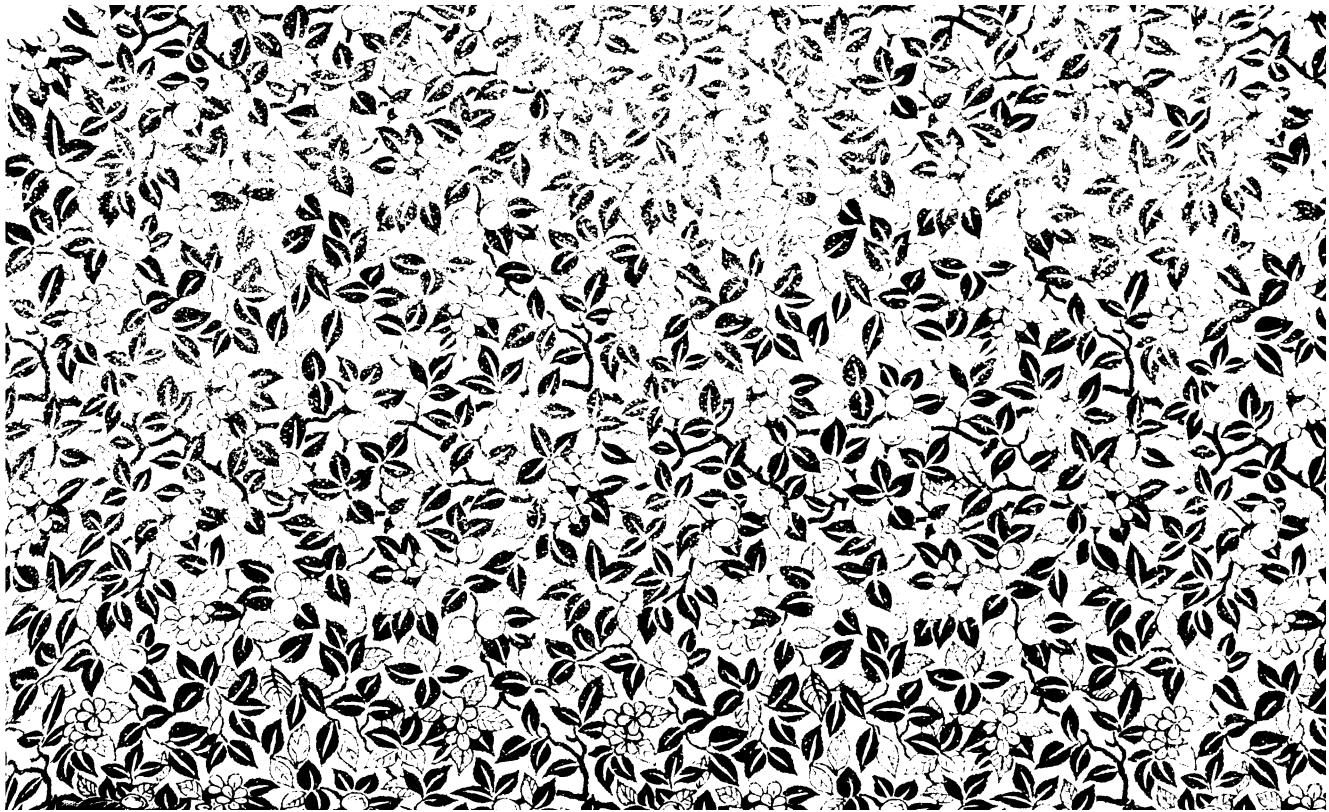
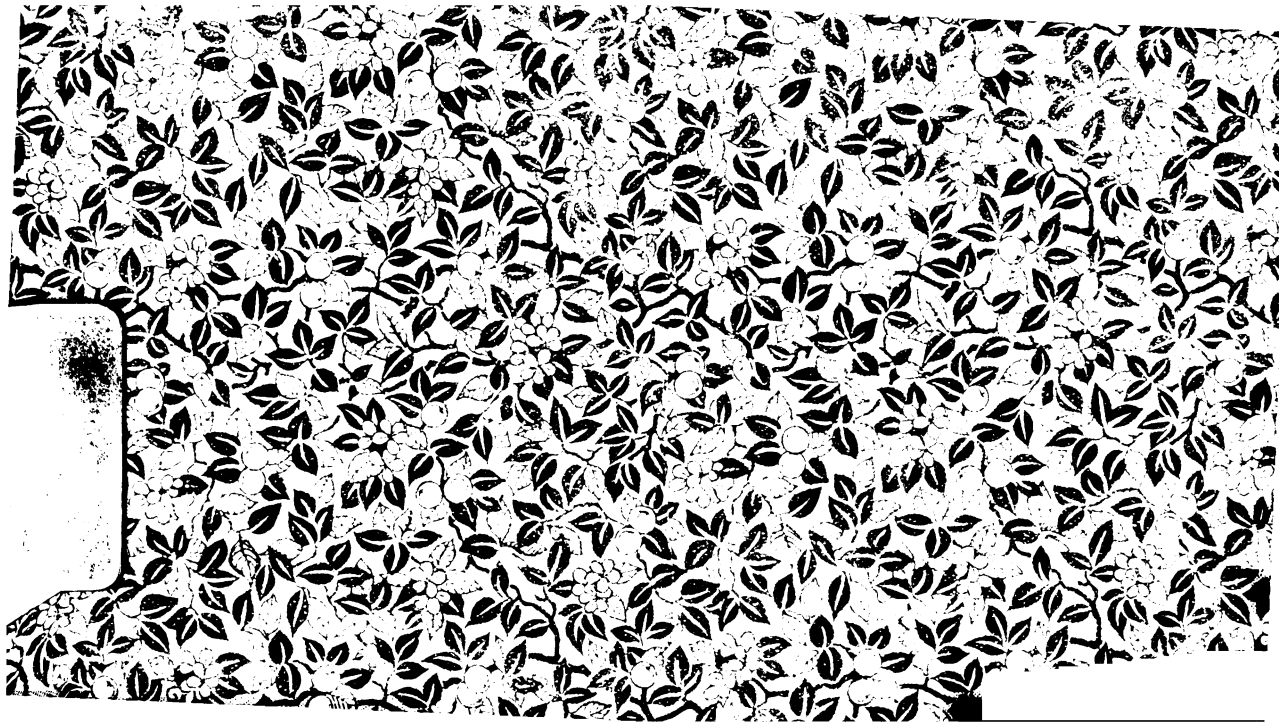
So she goes to the piano, and plays first

one thing and then another, while I sit listening here, holding Molly's hand and hiding my face down in the bed-clothes. It brings the past all back before my eyes. At first all is bright and happy. There are the green trees and the woods, and Arthur coming over the meadow. Presently I hear Jack upon the rocking-horse, going to and fro, hitting the floor with a sounding blow as he comes forward, almost stopping with a little uncertain swerve as he goes backward—there he goes, to and fro, to the sound of the girl's playing. Suddenly she begins an old minuet. She played it a few days since, and told me its history—how it was found in manuscript among a pile of music in an old country house in Germany, and brought to England by the finder a hundred years ago. It set me thinking then, it sets me dreaming now, and I shudder as I think of all the dead people who have danced to its stately movement. How strange it is that I can see quite plainly, here with my eyes shut, so much that has never

been save in my imagination. There is a long room with a polished floor, and the windows have little diamond-shaped panes of glass. By the fireplace, in which the fire has burnt dead and low, an old woman is sitting, crouching over the cinders. At the spinet by the window, with her face looking out, a faded, tired woman is playing and watching, for ever watching for some one who never comes. She is playing the minuet just as the Jewess is. The woman by the fire looks up. "He'll never come," she says—"he'll never come again." Then in at the door and softly over the polished boards the dancers come. There are high heels and diamond buckles to their shoes, there are trains to the ladies' dresses, they wear wigs and powder; and soft and slow and stately they begin to dance. The sounds go through me; they are sounds from the dead world coming back to the living. There the dancers go, prim and stately, young and old, fresh and withered, in and out the turns of the strange old dance. There is one in a

peach-coloured coat, and a lady who looks up as her train sweeps past him. Her little slipper is down at heel; the diamond is missing from her earring. He stoops over her hand and whispers. So they go on, till the music sounds farther and farther off, fainter and fainter, and with drooping heads and weary feet they steal away—ah, whither? Into the past again, back to the dead people among whom they have slept so long, the dead to whom we all are going. The sounds coming from the piano are but the sounds that have been awakened for many in years gone by, that may still awake again and again in the years to come. A child may bring them to life, a simple girl has power to send them on into space, and yet there is never one, wise or simple, that can bring back to life the atoms that have moved, and laughed, and wept, and loved, and forgot, as they listened to those haunting notes in the past. Oh! what is life, and where is it? Is it here in my heart that is so sore, or in my little child sleeping there; or is it in

those sounds that wander on anywhere that time or chance or fancy send them? It seems, as I sit here and listen, as if life for ever held fast by some strange force is theirs; life that is held but a little while by our own longing that is ours—life that is waiting for some freak or fancy to let it slip away into the eternal silence.

END OF VOL. I.

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